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Pleasure, Pain and Possibilities: An Ethnography of Working-Class Students at an Elite University

by

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84,953 words

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Regardless of what individual working-class males and females are able to negotiate and achieve for themselves within the educational field, the collective patterns of working-class trajectories within education remain sharply different from those of the middle classes, despite over a 100 years of universal state education (2001: 334).

Despite this, your personal trajectories have been an infallible resource of comfort, motivation and inspiration and I remain deeply moved, excited by and indebted to you all for opening up to me and gifting me with your individual unique journeys to and through an elite Russell Group university. Your narratives serve as a constant reminder of the moments and motivations behind

my decision to pursue sociology. It was an absolute honor to tell your personal stories, the pleasures, pains and possibilities, and for that, I am forever grateful.

Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the experiences of working-class, first-generation students who study at an elite university. The study is an ethnography and took place at one Russell Group university in England over an eighteen-month period from April 2015 – October 2016. The field site university has been given the pseudonym Stellar University. The core argument is that educational-success for the working-class participants of this study, by way of their elite university attendance is marked by pleasures, pains and possibilities. In seeking to argue such point, this thesis addresses three questions. Firstly, given that ‘New’ (post 1992) universities contain a high proportion of non-traditional students, and those from lower social class and black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds are poorly represented in ‘Old’ (pre-1992) universities (Boliver 2011; HEFCE 2017) What are the everyday lived experiences of working-class students at an elite university? In what ways are such experiences gendered and, if possible to say, raced? Secondly, given the speckled presence of working-class students at elite universities coupled with the notion “education is not about the valorization of working-classness but its erasure” (Reay 2001: 334) what is the effect of attendance at an elite university upon ties and relationships with ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends, family and romantic relations from the student’s home community? Finally, given massification and commodification of higher education and the rise of the pervasive public discourse that asserts universities to be engines of social mobility this study asks: In what ways do working-class students at an elite university understand and narrate their classed identity; do participants perceive social mobility through formal education a) as being possible, and b) as a desirable ideal and one that they strive for?

These questions are addressed through an array of methods that make up the ethnographic toolkit. Specifically, the study includes data gathered from twenty-seven working-class, first-generation undergraduate students in addition to a small number of interviews conducted with participants 'non-educationally mobile' family, friends and romantic partners. Furthermore, follow up interviews, walking and driving tours, photo elicitation interviews, documentary analysis and participant observations were also conducted with a sub set of working-class, first-generation undergraduate students. The data was analysed thematically and it is this that directs, guides and enlightens this thesis research findings and arguments.

This thesis concludes that participants class background shapes participants experience of being a working-class, first-generation student at the elite University of Stellar in profound ways that pervade the everyday experiences of working-class, first-generation students who attend an elite university both on campus and when among working-class family and friends and locale. The central argument of the study is that elite university attendance and all that is possible and probable is marked by much pleasure, pain and possibilities. This thesis demonstrates the complex experience of being working-class and experiencing educational success by way of elite university attendance in an epoch of heightening inequality and austerity. The conclusion of this thesis sets out the significance of the research and further areas for sociological enquiry.

Prologue. The Journey to and through a PhD

“A doctor, you’re going to study to be a Doctor of Medicine now?” asked my Nan, when I informed her that I would not be taking up paid work upon graduating from my BSc but had instead signed up for another four years of university by way of doctoral study. My own journey to and through my doctorate although atypical is neither ordinary nor extraordinary, at least in my own mind. As a former recipient of free school meals, a beneficiary of the welfare state and a student studying at a ‘national challenge’ and ‘special measures institution’ (as described by Ofsted and since academized) my attendance at university fell far outside of the norm. I was one of just 17% of my school year who obtained 5 A*-C GCSE’s. Whilst I have not been labelled ‘gifted’ I seldom feel that I have been “consigned to the waste bin of education” (Reay 2004: 1019). To stake a claim to the latter feels inauthentic, fraudulent and sensationalist given my current educational ‘success’. I grew up the eldest of two daughters, just eleven months apart and in the same school year as my younger sister. At aged ten my sister passed the eleven plus and gained entrance into a grammar school outside of our Greater London Borough for secondary education, I did not. As a primary school pupil I frequently required extra assistance with my studies, reading and writing were far from my forte. Each week, for hours on end, I would sit up the dinner table my mother supporting and encouraging me to learn my spellings, coaxing me and testing me. But every term time Friday morning I lived through the horror of failing yet another spelling test. When the grammar school entrance tests came around I was most puzzled as to why I was one of just a handful of students that were ordered to remain in class during lunchtime to receiving *coaching* on the 11 plus. Each and

every practice test I failed abysmally, and the real thing was no different. I have since learned that my mother insisted that I be entered into the 11 plus so as not to label my sister a success and myself a failure. Consequently, I attended the mixed comprehensive secondary school sandwiched in-between the Grammar School for Boys and the Grammar School for Girls. A decision based on the rational calculation that if my mum was driving my sister 30 minutes to school, then it made sense that I attend the ‘sink comprehensive’ adjacent, as opposed to “forking out” for the bus fee in order to that which was located within my home borough. Although a decision grounded in economic and temporal necessity it was nonetheless one that would later impact upon my educational trajectory in a defining way.

Secondary school was, from the outset, a joyous experience, socially and academically and my joy of learning quickly flourished, education was long something I valued; and now I was comparatively good at it. Despite my commitment to studying I never achieved particularly high grades within secondary school, this in turn led me to see myself as an educational non-achiever, what Roberts (2011) calls the ‘missing middle’. Although this perception was not shared by my school friends which became most apparent as we received our GCSE results at aged sixteen. The fact that I had passed *all* my CGSEs (gaining C’s across the board) and being within that 17% of students from my year group who had achieved the national benchmark 5 grade A* - C GCSEs, I was labelled “well clever”. The congratulations, applaud and encouragement that I received from my school peers that day (and ever since) staunchly calls into question discourses and pervasive misconceptions that

working-class people do not value education. In my experience, albeit anecdotal, they do.

I was one of a handful of students that stayed on at my comprehensive school's makeshift sixth form. Here I read AS levels in Art, Psychology and Business Studies although I ended the year (in my eyes) failing. I received the grades D, U, B respectively, despite huge efforts to revise, stick to deadlines and complete the coursework. Nestled within those disappointing AS level results was a rather respectable B grade in the subject of Business Studies. The only subject that I had studied at the Grammar School for Girls owing to the fact that my school did not offer it as an option. It was herein that I experienced first-hand what one can achieve academically when learning takes place in an adequately resourced school that is free from ever burgeoning class sizes and with long serving teachers (as opposed the constant churn of supply teachers I experienced). Importantly, I learnt what it meant for an institution to encourage and believe in its students' ability to succeed academically. Aware of the power of education, and armed with a glimpse into what a grammar school education could bestow, I decided to restart my A level education. Not possessing the necessary GCSE B grade prerequisites to gain formal admittance to the grammar school I instead picked my A levels strategically, choosing only those that were taught at the grammar school and required me to "sit in" on the lessons held there. After my first attempt at AS level I understood that a grammar school education was superior to my comprehensive. The little knowledge I had of the 'rules of the game' allowed me to partake. In doing so, I surpassed my A levels by three grade boundaries and at nineteen I was accepted into my first choice of university.

My discovery of sociology was simultaneously accidental and calculated. Prior to sixth form I hadn't heard of the subject, however, in 2008 when choosing my AS levels- for the second time- that my sister recommended that I study sociology. This recommendation was based on two things; the first was the fact that she thought I would "*really enjoy it*" because it was a subject that was, in her words, "*real*", and the second was based upon the quality of teaching offered. The course's teacher, Mrs Plowman, had a reputation for bringing the subject alive: teaching it in a way that was understandable and relatable. Moreover, every year a high number of students passed with high grades. Given my status at the grammar school as a visiting student from the local failing 'special measures' comprehensive 'down the road' (or 'the zoo' as it was overtly referred to by both members of the student body and academic staff at the grammar school) I did not want to take a gamble on my education by choosing subjects that sounded like they ran the risk of boring me, or where the content and teaching would not be what I was used to. Looking back I knew that it was important to enjoy a subject if I had any chance of getting a 'good grade'; and I needed 'good grades' in order to get into a 'good' university, so I went for it. A decade later from that decision, I remain in education studying sociology.

Like most working-class, first generation students, the purpose of attending university was a prerequisite for success within the paid economy. Participation in higher education was motivated by the pursuit of material acquisitions that academic credentials yield as opposed to intellectual, social or cultural developments. I regarded a degree as providing me with the platform from which

I would then be able to secure myself a comparatively well-paid job and thus secure financial independence. Initially I choose to embark on a university education in BSc Economics under the fallacy that it would bring financial gains where sociology would not, despite my love of the subject. However, just one week into my degree, I was bored by the numbers and feeling the pull of sociology upon my intellectual heart strings thus leading to my transferal to read BSc sociology.

Admittedly, it was not the plan to still be in the university library a near decade after my initial introduction to sociology. So what then happened along the way to drastically alter my perspective of education and career ideal? Why have I since swapped materialism (to a degree) for intellectualism? Why is it that I find myself unable to leave sociology? I think because, in short, like so many others, my relationship to sociology is a deeply personal one.

Throughout my sociological readings I have so often found the experiences of myself and those around me within the text. I was introduced to the concept of institutional racism a few months after watching my ethnic-minority peers stand in the dock and get handed custodial sentences for affray when their white, equally guilty counterparts walked away. It was a dark and daunting moment knocking on the front door of my good friends home informing his mother as to why her son would not be coming home that night or indeed any night soon; a memory yet to fade. Reading the McPherson report of the Stephen Lawrence enquiry as part of the A Level Sociology syllabus was a chilling experience as it dawned on me that I had often walked down the same streets and waited at the

same bus stop where the attack had occurred and sparked, now seminal, race relations legislation. I discovered Paul Willis (1977) '*Learning to Labour: How Working-Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*' when my male peers, despite their potential, had rejected education as a route for upward mobility and instead were moving into manual trades, operating within the low-level drugs market or dropping out of the paid economy altogether. I discovered Marxist perspectives on the role of education when my comprehensive school peers were persuaded to study for GNVQ's in childcare, home economics and sent to college two days a week to learn a trade when our grammar school counterparts at the school adjacent were encouraged to study for exams in economics, engineering and classics and were taken to university open days. Upon reading Bourdieu's (1979) '*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*' I finally understood why, at primary school, as a child on free school meals living in a council flat on the local 'sink estate' my friends' parents were reluctant to allow them to attend afterschool tea or weekend sleepovers at my flat. Today, I read of the gentrification of working-class neighbourhoods in London and further afield and cannot help but relate it back to my parents and grandparents' experiences of growing up and moving out of South East London. I not only debated the motivations behind the London 2011 'riots' as a university student but recognised faces on the news and listened to friends' stories of their role in events, and of course said no when one asked me if I could transport a newly acquired TV in my car to his house. It was my close proximity spatially and personally to various sociological issues of the day that pulled me to sociology.

I do not wish to romanticise or play upon my past because I am already so removed from it, I cannot help but feel that pursuing my passion for sociology

has pulled me away from the very experiences that compelled me to pursue it. As I sit at my desk I cannot help but feel a sense of fortune, luck and guilt as I constantly question how I came to be in the position that I am in when so many of those I grew up with are left living out the social ills of our times. Food poverty, the lack of affordable housing, shrinking jobs market, the rise in zero-hour contracts, the proliferation of low paid work, the privatization of the National Health Service and our education system are just some of the issues that overwhelmingly affect the lives of the working classes and the lives of my friends and family. Although I am yet to finish (and pass) my PhD it has already transported me, literally and metaphorically to places I had previously never dared to consider.

Moving between a working and middle-class field as a result of my university attendance was a juxtaposing and jarring experience that I have since attempted to make sense of. There is a strong sense of before and after: at university the rules of cultural and social life that I had been accustomed to were thrown out and new ones thrust upon me. I arrived at university glamorously dressed donning a faux fur coat, thigh high boots, a face full of makeup, head weaved with extensions and a boyfriend on my arm whose smile was marked by a shiny gold tooth. I learned almost instantly that this form of cultural capital yielded no currency or kudos within the new middle-class world of university I was entering and that much of what was valued within my working-class locale and community was to be frowned upon and not flaunted.

One Friday evening in the first term of university I received a phone call from my then boyfriend informing me that he had got into a fight, had been stabbed, taken and just as quickly discharged himself from hospital after ‘they’ (the hospital staff) *“looked at him like scum”* and had *“wanted to call the police”*. “Where have you been?” my flat mate asked when I entered the kitchen to re-join ‘pre-drinks’, *“oh just on the phone to my boyfriend, he’s just been stabbed?”* I answered in a matter of fact manner. Visibly and vocally shocked numerous gasps spread across the room, *“oh my god, are you okay Carli?”* another housemate, Florrie, tentatively asked putting her arm around me. *“Oh yeah, it’s alright”* I shrugged *“happens all the time”* This is where my lived experience of university began, with the stark realisation that what had come before was not congruent with lay ahead.

It is here that my journey to and through doctoral study began. It was through these experiences, and many, more, albeit unknowingly to me that sowed this thesis seeds. However, what follows throughout, the sociological conclusions drawn and personal stories told derive not from my own experience but from that of my participants’. It is their pleasures, pains and possibilities that fill the pages of what follows...

Introduction

Working-class relationships to education have always been deeply problematic and emotionally charged, inscribing academic failure rather than success.

(Reay 2001: 333)

Introduction and Context

This thesis seeks to explore the experiences of working-class, first-generation students who study at an elite university in the United Kingdom (UK). In doing so it explores some of the pleasures, pains and possibilities that elite UK university attendance yields for the participants of this study. In seeking to elucidate the content and focus of this thesis I find it imperative to present a brief distillation regarding the intellectual context and rationale.

Within the United Kingdom (UK) today, universities, *per se*, no longer remain the absolute preserve of an elite few. A university level education is no longer reserved, *de facto*, for solely the aristocratic and haute bourgeois male. One hundred and fifty years ago, to the very month of the submission of this thesis, in June 1868, the University of London's Senate voted to admit women allowing them to sit the General Examination. In doing so it became the first university in the Britain and the wider world to allow women to pursue a university education (University of London 2018). Some ninety-five years later and fifty-five years

ago this year, the epochal Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963) simplistically titled '*Higher Education*' affirmed the value of public UK higher education economically, socially, culturally and politically for both the individuals and society in both public and political consciousness. In doing so, the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963) exploded the myth that only the minority of society were suited to a university level degree and thus called for the universalization of higher education (Barr 2014; Holmwood 2014). In an epoch whereby an increasing number of students were achieving the required prerequisites for a university education limiting entry to higher education was perceived by all, as a major impediment to the health of the British economy. At the crux of the Robbins Report lay the notion that all those who possessed the required qualification and to wished to attend university should be able to do so. The Robbins Report conclusions were accepted in full and the notion of free, comprehensive education for all that was formerly at the heart of the 1944 Education Act was subsequently extended to encompass a university education. An epochal moment with Carswell asserting that "only the Beveridge Report [...] and the Poor Law Report of 1909 can compete with it for copiousness, cogency, coherence and historical influence" (1985: 38).

Subsequently, UK higher education expanded and student numbers proliferated from the 1970s onwards including those groups who had hitherto been excluded from the realm of higher education. However, since this period, within the past fifty-five years, UK higher education has been subject to much change. The introduction of university metrics such as the research excellence framework in 1986, the establishment of The Russell Group, the introduction *and* tripling of tuition fees and the removal of the cap of student names to name just four

examples that have served to alter the landscape of higher education within the UK. Among the myriad of changes, the most seminal changes of all were born out of the British Government's reforms in England, by way of the publication of the Browne Review Report in October 2010 (Brown 2010). At the heart of the Browne Review Report lay the repositioning of a university level education from an economic, social, cultural and political good for both the individual and society to an instrument of investment in human capital and wider economic growth as set out in the conservative-led coalition governments' White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System* (2011). As Holmwood argues, the Browne Review Report is "the most radical transformation of higher education since the Robbins Review in 1963" (Holmwood 2014: 62). The Brown Review Report (Brown 2010) introduced the marketization of higher education and with it the subject rampant commodification of a university education. The emphasis on social mobility and increasing student numbers from non-traditional backgrounds lay at the crux of the rhetoric surrounding the reforms. The move from an elite to a mass system of UK higher education has been accompanied by the prevailing public and political discourse that positions universities of sites of social mobility despite sociologies inconvenient truth (Brown 2013) that education is seldom a site that ameliorate socioeconomic and other inequalities but rather one that reproduces them (Boliver 2017; Brown 2013).

However, despite much change and indeed some constancies university is not uniformly accessed or experienced by all students (Read et al., 2003; Reay et al., 2001, 2005). Research from the UK and elsewhere illustrates the various ways in which class backgrounds shape educational experiences (Archer & Hutchings 2000; Hesketh 1999; Bufton 2003; Egerton & Halsey 1993). Social class remains

a key factor with regards to access to university (Reay, Davies, David and Ball 2001; Brooks 2003; Lehmann 2004, 2007). Reay et al. (2001, 2005) have demonstrated the ways in which class, race and gender shapes students' 'degrees of choice' in relation to higher education.

Within the UK a stark polarization exists between those universities attracting students from working-class backgrounds and those attracting a traditional middle-class cohort of students. 'New' (post 1992) universities contain a high proportion of non-traditional students, and those from lower social class backgrounds are poorly represented in 'Old' (pre-1992) universities (Boliver 2011), particularly so within the Russell Group universities (Ogg et al. 2009; Boliver 2013). Consequently, Boliver (2013: 324) argues 'it has become increasingly important to consider not only who goes to university but also where they go'. Students choose to attend universities where they feel they belong (Read et al., 2003; Reay, Crozier & Clayton 2009). Given this, working-class students are most likely to attend post-1992 universities within the UK even when they have the required qualifications to attend more prestigious universities (Jerrim 2013). Nevertheless, there are a number of students from working-class backgrounds who choose to study at the UK's most elite universities. Previous research elucidates the way in which these students often occupy positions of cultural outsiders, leading to a lack of academic and social integration (Lehmann 2007; Thomas & Quinn 2007; Aries & Seider 2005) albeit not always (Reay et al., 2009). This research seeks to contribute and build upon this illuminating body of research, in doing so, this research explores the experiences of working-class, first-generation students at an elite UK institution. In doing so, throughout, I recognize the continual interplay between the classed, ethnic and gendered identities of participants whilst also paying attention to the

way in which welfare, poverty and place compound participants' experiences of Stellar University, the latter of which seldom feature in academic accounts pertaining to the working-class students' experiences of higher education. It is hoped that this research will build upon, expand and contribute to sociological understandings regarding the 'lived experience' of working-class students at an elite university thereby elucidating the emotional politics of class and working to create a more inclusive and just landscape of higher education albeit, in recognition, that there is much work to be done.

Whilst the university experiences of working-class students have been the focus of sociological research, such studies have concentrated upon working-class students' experiences of university in relation to the 'on-campus experience'. There exists a limited, albeit exceptionally illuminating, body of research exploring the effects of university attendance upon working-class students' relations with their home communities and friends (Baxter & Britton 2001; Lee and Kramer 2013). Being working-class *and* educationally successful, as much sociological literature contends is a deeply ambivalent and contradictory experience (Hey 1997, Ingram 2009, 2011, 2018; Reay 1997; Skeggs 1997b). As Reay has argued, "In England, in the minority of cases when the equation of working class plus education equals academic success, education is not about the valorization of working classness but its erasure; education as escape" (2001: 334). It is this phenomenon, the phenomenon of being working-class *and* academically successful that this study seeks to further explore and contribute to.

Social stratification and social mobility has been at the crux of the collective

sociological imagination within British sociology (Breen, 2005; Erickson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Goldthorpe et al., 1969, 1980; Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2007; Halsey et al., 1980; Marshall et al., 1997). However, much of this research has framed social mobility as a progressive force thus mirroring the wider political rhetoric as Reay (2013) recently noted. Recently, the sociological community has called for greater attention to be accorded to exploring the difficulties elicited and endured as a result of social mobility. What Sennett and Cobb (1977) refer as “the hidden injuries” and what Friedman (2014) alludes to as being “the price of the ticket”. As Lee and Kramer concluded in their study exploring habitus and social mobility at a selective college in United States of American (USA) “social mobility does not come without sacrifice and that these sacrifices warrant more serious study in the sociology of stratification” (2013: 18). Closer to home, on this side of the Atlantic, Friedman (2014) recently called for sociological research to explore the costs endured as a result of social mobility. Such call, is, in part, due to the recognition that, to echo Friedman, “work on mobility has often stressed the tension of the parvenu’s struggle to gain acceptance in their new social group, little work has focused on how connections to one’s ‘roots’ can also endure, and what psychic costs are incurred” (2014: 363).

In the sociologically infamous ‘Education and the Working Class’ Jackson and Marsden (1963) elucidated the way in which, for the home owning working-class participants of their study, educational attainment was often accompanied with a break away from their working-class cultural beginnings. There exists a small, impassioned and illuminating body of research that documents the experience of being working-class *and* educationally successfully written by leading female UK academics from working-class families in Mahony and

Zmroczek (1997) *Class Matters: 'Working Class' Women's Perspectives on Social Class*. These include the work of Hey (1997), Reay (1997), Skeggs (1997b) and Morley (1997) to name just four of the contributors. At the heart of these accounts lay the conflict, the contradiction, the ambivalence and at times both alienation *and* liberation that educational success brings for those from working-class backgrounds. Although published two decades ago, the centrality and longevity of such feelings were reasserted in a recent revival event 'Does Class Still Matter? Conversations about Power, Privilege and Persistent Inequalities in Higher Education' (CHEER 2017). Whilst much of this work is insightful, illuminating the complexities that working-class educationally successful individuals endure, it nevertheless derives largely from the reflections, perspectives and sentiments of working-class born successful academics (see also hooks 2000, Hoskins 2010; Maguire 2005). Similarly, Lucey et al. (2003) highlighted the psychosocial costs and complexities of becoming educationally successful for working-class young women. In doing so they cast light on the way in which educational success can bring about tension among family and friends who do not share the same journey as does the work of Baxter and Britton (2001) who explore mature students' experiences of studying at university.

There exists an absence of previous examinations that has sought to explore such issues as they relate to working-class students in elite higher education and higher education per se. Thus, in responding to Freidman's call (2014) and seeking to contribute and expand this body of literature, this thesis will explore the effects of attendance at an elite university upon working-class students' experiences of social mobility as it is in flux. To do so, this thesis explores the

effects of academic success, by way of elite university attendance upon participants' 'non-educationally mobile' friends, family and romantic partners; the ways in which participants understand and narrate their classed identity; and the extent to which participants perceive social mobility through formal education a) as being possible b) and a desirable ideal that they strive for.

The Study

The ethnographic study took place at Stellar University, a Russell Group university in England over an eighteen-month period from April 2015 – October 2016. With regards to the studies ethnographic toolkit, the research involved interviews with twenty-seven working-class, first-generation undergraduate students at Stellar University in addition to a small number of interviews conducted with participants' 'non-educationally mobile' family, friends and romantic partners, walking and driving tours, photo elicitation interviews, documentary analysis and observations. This produced rich data which was analysed thematically and subsequently forms the basis of the analysis and discussion chapters throughout this thesis.

Throughout this research a Bourdieusian theoretical framework will be drawn upon to in order to facilitate the exploration of participant' experiences. Specially, I draw upon Bourdieu's notion of habitus, field and his metaphorical framework of economic, social and cultural capital. In doing so, I follow much work within the sociology of education that has employed Bourdieusian scholarship to explore various issues of social class and education (Abrahams and Ingram 2013; Bathmaker et al., 2013; Ingram 2009, 2011, 2018; Reay 2009). Bourdieu's conceptual tool of habitus is especially useful when seeking to

explore and theorize the mismatching of practices and dispositions that one acquires through early life experiences (e.g. growing up in a working-class family and thus internalizing working-class culture) with dispositions generated as the result of novel life experiences (e.g. attending an elite university). Through drawing upon the tool of habitus I propose to further understand sociologically how classed (and other) dispositions are (or are not) restructured through the novel social experience of attending an elite UK university. In addition, Bourdieu's (1986) metaphorical framework of capitals economic, social and cultural are drawn upon when seeking to explore the effects of elite university attendance on participants' relationships with their 'non-educational mobile' working-class friend's family and in some cases romantic partners. I found Bourdieu's framework of capitals especially useful when thinking about what one gains, losses, maintains and develops as a result of elite university attendance.

This research is an ethnography of working-class, first-generation experiences of elite university attendance. The central argument of the study is that elite university attendance and all that is possible and probable is marked by much pleasure, pain and possibilities. The study has three core focuses, the first main focus is upon participants' socio-cultural experiences of being working-class within the elite middle-class field of Stellar University, the second grapples with participants' experience of being the first in their family to attend university and of the effects of elite university upon participants' 'non-educationally mobile' family, friends and romantic relations. Finally, the third main focus of this thesis seeks to explore the extent to which participants perceive social mobility as a result of their elite university attendance as possible and one that

they desire. To achieve this, this study address three research questions:

1. What are the everyday lived experiences of working-class students at an elite university? In what ways are such experiences gendered, and, if possible to say, raced?
2. What is the effect of attendance at an elite university upon ties and relationships with ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and family from the student’s home community?
3. In what ways do working-class students at an elite university understand and narrate their classed identity; do participants perceive social mobility through formal education a) as being possible, and b) as a desirable ideal and one that they strive for?

Mapping the Thesis Structure

Chapter one ‘*Working-Class Educational Success: Complexities, Conflicts and Contradictions: Exploring What is Known and What is Not*’ presents a review of the literature pertaining to working-class educational success. This chapter begins by exploring the already recognized complexities of being working-class and educationally successful, it then presents literature pertaining to the experiences of working-class students in Western higher education. This is followed by a discussion regarding the role of theory in research on higher education and social class and elucidates the role of Bourdieusian theory within this thesis. This literature review is drawn to a conclusion with a brief distillation of social class and social mobility and asks why there exists so few ethnographies of higher education?

Following on from this, chapter two entitled '*Methods and Moments: An Ethnographer's Toolkit and Tales*' elucidates in detail the research methods that make up this ethnographies toolkit. In doing so I begin by elucidating my decision to undertake a feminist ethnography of working-class undergraduate students at an elite university in the United Kingdom. I then outline my methodological toolkit: identifying when, how, and with whom my empirical material was produced; paying attention to how my commitment to ethical research and confidentiality – together with the personal, the political, the temporal and, unexcitingly, the practical – shaped the formation of this doctoral research design; time spent in the field and the writing up of the research. This chapter is drawn to a conclusion with an explicit, critical consideration of my experience of conducting an ethnography of working-class students at an elite university as a working-class student at an elite university in light of the dearth of ethnographic literature on higher education.

Following on from the research methods chapter I present three analytic chapters. The analytic chapters are structured in somewhat of a thematic order that mirrors the research questions. I begin by exploring participants' experiences of Stellar University through to the way in which they perceive social mobility through formal education as being possible and a desirable ideal that they strive for. Chapter three entitled '*Racism, Classism and the Politics of Belonging: How Working-Class Student's Experience an Elite University*' draws upon data that derives largely from that generated through one-to-one interviews with participants and participant observation to explore the politics of belonging at Stellar University. To do so, throughout the analysis I recognised the continual interplay between the classed, ethnic and gendered identities of participants. I

then progress to the way in which, for a small number of participants their lived experience of being at an elite university powerfully intersected with their subjectivity as being a current and/or former recipient of welfare and/or social housing resident. This chapter argues that, taken together, the anecdotes that participants shared and the myriad other anecdotes that did not make it into this thesis make one headline conclusion of this thesis clear: racism and classism on campus prevails and shapes participants' everyday experiences of Stellar University in profound ways. Specifically, this chapter elucidates, and argues that, for the participants of this study classism and racism occurred, both implicitly and explicitly, at the micro and macro level and permeated participant's everyday mundane interactions ranging from the social, the romantic and the academic. Be it in the credentialed curriculum through the inclusion and perpetuation of negative stereotypes relating to class, ethnicity place and space within lectures and course readings; or be it in relation to socio-cultural experiences of Stellar University. The latter of which relating to the way in which participants were being mistaken for 'locals', trying to 'crash' student events and even being accused of lying about their student status in order to romantically impress others to give just three examples.

In chapter four *'Elite University Attendance and Changing Relations: Family, Friends and the Self'* I acknowledge that that much research pertaining to working-class students at elite universities (and universities per se) have concentrated upon working-class students' 'on-campus experience'. Recognizing the limited, albeit illuminating body of research exploring the effects of university attendance upon working-class students' relations with their home communities and the effects of educational success for working-class

persons are felt, to borrow a phrase from Ingram, both “within school and beyond the gate” (Ingram 2011: 287) this chapter considers the effects of elite university attendance upon participants’ relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and family. Data for this chapter derives largely from that generated through field notes, interviews, photo elicitation, walking interviews, driving interviews and participant observation. This chapter argues that participants’ reluctance to envisage academic work as equating ‘hard’ work and their academic feelings of imposterism and fraudulence at Stellar University alongside participants’ time poverty, lack of economic capital *and* their acquirement of new cultural capital more aligned with the middle-classes contributes to the breakdown of connections with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and family at times. This chapter argues, that, at the heart of participants’ narratives was a deep disjunction between a working-class field and their arguably evolved or evolving habitus, as Bourdieu argues “when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a ‘fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted.” (1992: 127). Importantly, throughout this chapter, in attending to participants’ accounts, attention is given to the emotions that are aroused and of the reflexive, nuanced way in which participants, themselves are *trying* to understand their experience of being a ‘fish out of water’ (Bourdieu and Patterson 1979) as a result of their elite university attendance.

Chapter four is then followed by the final analytic chapter, chapter five entitled *‘Sibling Rivalry and Romantic Rifts, the Pains and Possibilities of Elite University Attendance and Participants’ Perceptions of Social Class and Social Mobility’* which encapsulates exactly what I attend to within this chapter. Data

for this derives from across the fieldwork, namely through that collected through one-on-one interviews, interviews with participants' 'non-educationally mobile' family members and romantic partners and through conversations between myself and participants during participant observation. To begin, this chapter explores the effects of elite university attendance upon participants' relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' working-class siblings and romantic partners paying particular attention to the emotions aroused for all and to the gendered intersections of such experience(s). The female participants imagined that as a result of the economic capital that elite university attendance would yield upon graduation they would be the family breadwinner thus calling into question hegemonic (hetero)-presumptions of family life. This possible reversal of traditional gender roles was welcomed by participants' romantic partners and led the female participants of this study to question the longevity of current romantic relationships as well as future ones with 'non-educationally mobile' working-class individuals. This chapter then progresses to explore the ways in which the participants of this study conceptualized social-class; the extent to which participants perceive social mobility through formal education: a) *as being possible*, and b) as a *desirable ideal* that they strive for. In doing so, this chapter proposes a four-tiered typology regarding the various ways in which the working-class, first-generation students conceptualize social class and social mobility as a result of their educational success by way of their attendance at the elite, Stellar University. This four-tiered typology encompasses the typologies of class anchors, class drifters, class bespoke and class abandoners. It is in this vein that this thesis contributes to sociological debates pertaining to social-class, social mobility and the role of elite education (and education per se) as a contributor to social mobility.

Finally, in the conclusion I return to the original research questions sketching out areas worthy of further sociological attention and enquiry. To begin this thesis, I present an overview of the existing literature pertaining to working-class educational success and working-class students' experiences of university thus situating this thesis within the wider research debates.

Chapter 1. Working-Class Educational Success: Complexities, Conflicts and Contradictions: Exploring What Is Known and What is Not

Introduction

An array of sociological literature has long sought to explore working-class relations to education. Overwhelmingly, there has been the tendency to focus upon the educational failure of the working-classes (Archer and Yamashita 2003; Corrigan 1979; Giroux 1983; Lacey 1970; MacLeod 1987, McFadden 1995; Reay 2004; Willis 1977). It is only recently in line with the massification of higher education that sociological research has begun to focus its attention to working-class educational success (Reay 2001; Maguire 2005; Hey 2006), in doing so great attention has been accorded to exploring the costs involved in reconciling a working-class identity with educational success (Skeggs 1997a, Reay 2001, Walkerdine et al., 2001; Black 2005; Hoskins 2010). This section seeks to present an overview of the existing literature on working-class relations to educational success. To do so, this chapter begins by exploring the already recognised complexities of being working-class and educationally successful, it then presents literature pertaining to the experiences of working-class students in Western higher education. This is followed by a discussion regarding the role of theory in research on higher education and social class and elucidates the role of Bourdieusian theory within this thesis. This literature review is drawn to a conclusion with a brief distillation of social class and social mobility and asks why there exists so few ethnographies of higher education? Throughout consideration is given to where this thesis seeks to make an intervention within

the field. This literature review is structured to broadly reflect different themes and issues that emerges from the existing body of research, although, as this title alludes to, the literature pertaining to working-class educationally success is marked by complexities, conflicts and contradictions.

Working-Class Relations to Education

Well recognised among sociological literature is the ‘problematic’ nature of working-class relations to education, though there are few notable exceptions (Ingram 2009, 2011, 2018; Lacey 1970; Mac and Ghail 1994; Reay et al., 2009) little attempt has been made to understand the life worlds of those educationally successfully individuals. Sociologists have, until relatively recently preoccupied themselves with illuminating the relative underachievement of working-class individuals and in doing so have largely accounted for such phenomena in terms of cultural deficiency. Even Lacey’s *Hightown Grammar* (1970) argued that the “correlations between social class and academic achievement” (Lacey 1970: 57) were “not completely determined by external factors” (Lacey 1970: 57), but rather the result and consequence of the working-classes innate “anti-school sub-culture” (Lacey 1970: 187) and their satisfaction “with less actual achievement” (Lacey 1970: 191). In addition, it was in the classic study *Learning to Labour* (1977) that Willis set out his argument that in the UK class background, culture and practices not only structures working-class responses to the institution of the school but is too responsible for the impediment of academic achievement. Utilising a rich infusion of case study analysis, participant observation, group discussions and interviews, Willis ethnographically surveyed the school-to-work transition of a group of ‘non-academic’ working-class boys (or as Willis terms them, ‘lads’) in an attempt to unearth the reasoning as to why so many of the working-classes end up on the shop floor. In doing so, Willis concluded that it

is the boys' "own culture which most effectively prepares some working-class lads for the manual giving of their labor power" (1977: 3). Aware of the illusionary nature of equal opportunity within the capitalist system and the false promise of education for the 'lads' of Willis' study, "the possibility of real upward mobility seems so remote as to be meaningless" (1977: 126). Thus, it is in this vein that for Willis the lads' "refusal to compete, implicit in the counter school culture, is therefore in the sense a radical act: it refuses to collude in its own educational suppression" (1977: 128). At the crux of *Learning to Labor* lies the argument that a working-class culture precludes academic success. Working-class culture Willis (1977) contends was regularly drawn upon as a resource in attempts to subvert the school system, thereby fuelling the systematic preclusion of academic success. Though Willis's study focused only on males the findings are nevertheless insightful if even experienced as a paradox for those working-class educationally successful persons at times; if one's commitment to a working-class identity results in an individual's subjugation as was the case for Willis's "lads" then what becomes of those working-class born persons that value their working-class culture yet succeed within formal education? How are they able to overcome, to reconcile, if at all such dichotomy?

The conception that working-class individuals experience a "culture clash" (Lynch and O'Riordan 1998: 452) within educational institutions is a theme that pervades much educational research. As Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) maintain "conflicts in cultural practices between the lifeworld of the students and the organisational culture of schools" (Lynch and O'Riordan 1998: 452) dominate and shape the working-class experience of education often setting them on a trajectory of educational failure. Ingram (2009), in a more recent UK study

argues that there continues to be a misrecognition of working-class culture within schools. Like Willis (1977), Ingram acknowledges that working-class culture with its various practices and dispositions is in direct opposition to those of the school in myriad ways. Thus, Ingram asserts is the working-class student “to attach the same labels to his home culture or people?” (Ingram 2009: 429). Thus, the suggestion out forth by much of the existing the literature is that *being* working-class and *expressing* a working-class culture is not only a disadvantage but a barricade to academic success. Therefore, in order to achieve academic success “the working-class student must overcome his inbuilt disadvantage of possessing the wrong class culture and the wrong educational decoders to start with” (Willis 1977: 128). The pupil is required, as Brown (1987) argues “to change his or her educational identity in important ways” (1987: 105), for it is only when the practices and dispositions of the working-class pupil has been changed by the education system (Corrigan 1970:7 0) that academic success for the working-class subject may be within sight. Like Brown (1970), Jackson and Marsden (1962) argue that in order to achieve academically, working-class students are required to “completely reorient how they viewed the world and in many cases reject and devalue their working-class background” (Lehmann 2007: 92). As Jackson and Marsden argue in their UK study:

Grammar school, marked, for most children, a sharp break with their former world...their rejection of neighbourhood life became more than a matter of simply not having the time: gradually it became a conscious and articulate rejection of a way of life. (Jackson and Marsden 1962: 212)

It is thus, perhaps, for this reasoning that the working-classes continue to have little, if any sense of entitlement with regards to education. As Archer and Hutchings (2000: 5) argue, working-class subjects:

Positioned themselves ‘outside’ of HE (e.g. constructing HE as a white, and/or middleclass place), placing themselves as potentially able to take advantage of the benefits it can offer, but not as ‘owners’ of it.

Although the studies of Lacey (1970), Willis (1977) and Jackson and Marsden (1962) can be critiqued, as Baxter and Britain (2001) maintain the studies are “historically specific, linked to the post war baby boom, the working through of post-war equal opportunities policies, and the predominance of the institution of the grammar” (Baxter and Britain 2001: 95) they were nevertheless the first to cast light on the cultural inequalities of social class in the UK. Whilst it may be of surprise to those who are insistent upon repudiating the salience of class contemporary sociological enquiries continue to identify similar problems (Archer & Hutchings 2002; Colliander & Grinstead 2008; Leathwood and O’Connell 2003; Reay et al., 2009). Connolly (2004) demonstrates the continued conception of working-class deficiency in his study of working-class boys whom are denied academic achievement and instead focus upon pastoral care. As Reay (2004) argues, working-class schoolchildren are subject to “powerful discourses of demonization” (Reay 2004: 1008) and continue to be “consigned to the waste bin of education” (Reay 2004: 1019). Thus, it is with this in mind that this study seeks to explore working-class educational success by way of elite university attendance. However, before seeking to do so, this chapter turns to discuss the already sociologically acknowledged structurally contradictory nature of working-class relations to education.

Working-Class and Educationally Successful a Structural Contradiction?

Though the working-class deficiency model has, in recent years been critiqued (MacLeond 1987; Mac and Ghail 1988, 1994; Connolly 2004; Reay 2004) the notion that academic success is “dependent on the abandonment of aspects of

working-class background” (Ingram 2011: 287) is a powerful notion that continues to prevail. As Lynch and O’Neil (1994) argue working-class people occupy a “structurally contradictory in relation to education” (Lynch and O’Neil 1994: 307), on one hand the authors contend, social mobility requires formal education yet to succeed in education is to “cease to be working-class at least to some degree (Lynch and O’Neil 1994: 307). Therein lays the structural contradiction and the dichotomy of being working-class and educationally successful, a problematic in which this study seeks to further illuminate. However, Lynch and O’Neil’s (1994) thesis has been critiqued. Morley (1997), for example, argues that Lynch and O’Neil (1994) “overlook the complex, unstable nature of identity” (Morley 1997: 113), they fail to consider or account for an understanding of identity as transformative, fluid and constantly influx thus ignoring the way in which “structural forces and individual agency combine to shape identities” (Vincent 2003: 5). Thus, it is in this vein as to why this study seeks to elucidates the class identity perceptions of working-class students at an elite university by asking whether they perceive still themselves as being working-class and the implications academic success with have upon their future class identity.

Education as an Erasure of Working-Classness

As Reay argues, “education is not about the valorization of working-classness but its erasure” (Reay 2001: 334) for it is a system that values “middle rather than working-class cultural capital” (Reay 2001: 334) and success within it thus requires the sacrifice of a ‘working-classness’ and the accumulation of ‘middle-classness’. Working-class individuals that succeed within the academy endure a “double blind” (Reay 1997: 445), for it is in the academy that “assimilation constitutes betrayal [... whilst] holding on to aspects of working-class identity

mark out [...] unacceptability” (Reay 1997: 445). An argument earlier articulated in the impassioned writings of bell hooks when she writes of how she was:

Encouraged, as many students are today, to betray our class origins. Rewarded if we chose to assimilate, estranged if we choose to maintain those aspects of who we were, some were all too often seen as outsiders (hooks 1994:182)

Like bell hooks (1994) Aronowitz & Giroux (1991) argue that the main purpose of schooling upon the student is “to reconstitute his or her formation in terms of the boundaries imposed by hegemonic intellectuals acting for the prevailing social order” (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991: 163). For Aronowitz & Giroux (1991) working-class academically successful students “submission to the curriculum already signifies probable social mobility” (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991: 163) and the erosion of a working-class identity. Similarly, Baxter and Britton (2001) argue that “the movement away from a working-class habitus...is an inevitable consequence of being in higher education” (Baxter and Britton 2001: 87). To be educated, they argue, is “to stake claim to a new identity [...it is the] process of becoming a different person” (Baxter and Britton 2001: 87) and for the subjects in Baxter and Britton’s study education was envisaged as setting them on a “trajectory of class mobility” (Baxter and Britton 2001: 99).

As Skeggs (1997a: 82) argues: “In order to improve [the working class individual] is required to differentiate themselves from those who could not improve”. For some, education is envisaged as a means by which they are able to achieve both difference and social mobility (Skeggs 1997a and Baxter and Britton 2001). It is also envisaged within a context of escape (Lucy, Melody and Walkerdine’s 2003: 297), the required and consequential “‘internal and external ‘makeover’” (Lucy, Melody and Walkerdine’s 2003: 297) and changes that are

brought about by education can have both positive and negative effects for working and middle-class individuals. For example, Baxter and Britton (2001) found that education enabled working-class students to break from negative aspects of a working-class culture, thus challenging of traditional forms of working-class conceptions of masculinity and the division of labour for example. Education was also found to place strains on the family life of mature middle-class students too. As Baxter and Britton argue (2001):

Education changes people...they experience themselves as having become different sorts of people, of having developed aspects of themselves in different ways. Education is seen as realising aspects of the self which have been pushed aside (Britton & Baxter 1999 cited in Baxter and Britton 2001: 94)

However, “changes in identity brought about by education [are...] more challenging to working-class students” (Baxter and Britton 2001: 99) thus it is in this vein that my study focuses solely on working-class participants’ experiences of educational success and its effects. Despite the fact that those working-class individuals whom have succeeded in navigating the terrain of education comprise a marginal group (Hoskins 2010) their experiences of academic success have nevertheless been profoundly acknowledged (Hey 2003; Maguire 2005; Mahony & Zmroczek 1997; Reay 2001). Highlighted in this literature is sense of ambivalence that cuts deep, voiced are the challenges of reconciling the disjunction between social mobility, class dislocation and class loyalty, a phenomenon in which Sennett and Cobb (1972) conceptualises as the *hidden injuries of class*. Mahony & Zmroczek (1997) for example, reflecting upon the complexity of their sense of class identity write of how they were:

Told repeatedly that by virtue of our education and our ‘position in the labour market’ we were not working class, we did not feel middle class nor believe that we had necessarily ‘gone up in the world. (Mahony & Zmroczek 1997: 1)

As Mahony and Zmroczek (1997) note, countless UK working-class academics write of their “feelings of anger and guilt at being part of the academy [whilst] at the same time...excited by intellectual work” (Mahony and Zmroczek 1997: 5). These contradictory moods of anger, guilt and excitement, are, perhaps due to the fact that “not being middle class is certainly valued in many working class social groups” (Skeggs, 1997a: 11). Consequently, as Skeggs argues, “careful monitoring for pretensions often takes place” (Skeggs 1997: 11) in which Skeggs argues in most evident “in the long standing clichés, such as ‘too big for your boots’ [...] or ‘stepping out of line’ (Skeggs 1997a: 11). Clichés, Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) assert serve to remind us of our both our place and who we are. As Gardner (1993) asserts, many working-class academics “learn very early in their careers that their life-style, general interests, and work are largely incomprehensible to their families” (Gardner 1993: 54). Such phenomena, Wright, et al. (2007) argue, leave those working-class subjects whom have achieved educational success “uncomfortable and out of place, as ‘outsiders within’ or ‘insiders-out’” (Wright et al., 2007: 153). For Merton and Barber (1963), the collusion between differing sets of rules, values and beliefs is the primary source of sociological ambivalence related to and as a result of social mobility. Such body of literature raises important questions pertaining to social class and it is in this vein that this study seeks to explore participants’ perceptions as to whether they believe that elite university attendance will have an effect upon their future class positioning.

Working-Class Students in Western Higher Education

Within Western societies an array of sociological literature has long sought to explore working-class relations to education. Overwhelmingly, there has been a tendency to focus upon the educational failure of the working classes. It is only recently, in line with the expansion of higher education, the global concern of widening participation and the rise of the pervasive public discourse that asserts that university-level credentials are necessary for success within an increasingly globalised and highly skilled economy that sociological research has begun to focus its empirical and theoretical attention on working-class academic success (Baxter and Britton 2001; Ingram 2009; 2011; Lehmann 2013; Maguire 2005; Reay 2001). In doing so, the working-class experience of higher education had been placed under sociological scrutiny. This chapter seeks to present a critical review of the existing literature on working-class students and Western higher education, acknowledging the achievements that this research has brought as well as identifying pertinent critiques and lacunae. In seeking to do so this chapter focuses particularly upon literature arising from Anglo-Saxon countries and engages with four key themes that pervade the literature on higher education and the working classes: accessing university; spatial (im)mobility; the psychosocial experience of working-class students in Western higher education; and extra-credential experiences four key themes that pervade the literature on higher education and the working classes accessing university; spatial (im)mobility; the psychosocial experience of working-class students in Western higher education and extra-credential experiences. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion reflecting upon the direction for future research.

Accessing University

To echo Read et al. (2003), university is not uniformly accessed or experienced. Research from the UK has illustrated the various ways in which class backgrounds shape educational experiences (Archer and Hutchings 2000; Bufton 2003; Egerton and Halsey 1993; Hesketh 1999) and studies from across the Western world continue to illustrate that social class remains a key factor with regard to access to university (Brooks 2003; Lehmann 2007a Reay 2001; Reay et al., 2001). Reay et al. (2005) have demonstrated the ways in which class, 'race' and gender shape students' 'degrees of choice' in relation to higher education and research demonstrates that even when working-class students have the same educational qualifications as their middle-class counterparts fewer apply to study at university (Hatcher 1998 and Metcalf 1997 cited in Archer and Hutchings 2002). Within the UK, data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA 2015) demonstrates that, of UK-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants in the academic year 2012/13, a mere 10.9 per cent of these students were from low participation neighbourhoods and 30.3 per cent of students were from the lower four national statistics socio-economic classification indicators. And, far from being restricted to the UK, this pattern appears in all industrialized countries (Goldthorpe 1996; Hatcher 1998).

Sociological research has extensively recognized that institutional culture has long placed students from working-class backgrounds as the 'other' within higher education (Lynch and O'Neill 1994; Tett 2000). Research demonstrates the way in which working-class students often accept such dominant discourses, overwhelmingly envisaging higher education as 'an unthinkable lifestyle option' (Archer et al., 2007: 231), as the preserve of those that are "'posher', 'cleverer' [...] 'people with money'" (Archer et al., 2007: 231). Archer and Hutchings

(2000) highlight that working-class students are discouraged from applying to university as they envisage academia as being alien to them; as one of Tett's participant's eloquently expressed, "people from my area don't go to university" (Tett 2000: 188). Despite such a perception, there has nevertheless been an increase in working-class student participation in higher education and subsequently sociological attention has been accorded to their experience of attending university.

At present, within the UK there exists a stark polarization between those universities attracting students from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds and those attracting a traditional middle-class cohort of students (Reay et al., 2005). 'New' (post-1992) universities, which have more open access, contain a statistically high proportion of non-traditional students, with those from the lower social classes and ethnic minority backgrounds being poorly represented in 'Old' (pre-1992) universities (HESA 2015, HESA 2018). This is particularly the case within the Russell Group universities (Boliver 2013). This phenomenon has come to be known within the UK as the 'access gap'. At the same time the proliferation of higher education providers has resulted in greater divides between 'Old' and 'New' universities within the UK, with evidence illustrating that university graduates from prestigious universities have a greater likelihood of earning higher salaries and securing managerial and professional occupations (Bratti et al., 2004). It is in this vein that Boliver (2013: 345) argues that 'it has become increasingly important to consider not only who goes to university but also where they go'. The picture in the USA mirrors that of the UK: in 2000, students from the bottom 50 per cent of the income distribution accounted for just 10 per cent and 12 per cent of first-year students at Princeton and Harvard respectively (Karabel 2005).

The access gap prevails throughout the Western world (Jerrim 2013). Jerrim found that children from professional backgrounds are 3.2 times more likely to attend a high-status university than students from a working-class family. This finding holds true for elite public sector colleges in Australia, England and the United States. This same body of research found that 27 per cent of this difference “is not explained by academic ability” (Jerrim 2013: 2). Thus, the suggestion is that a significant number of working-class students, ‘even though they have the academic ability to attend, choose to enter a non-selective institution instead’ (Jerrim 2013: 8). Much of the literature addressing this issue has focused upon the applications and admissions process, exploring working-class students’ decisions about where to study alongside admissions rates. Research in the UK by Reay et al. (2005) demonstrates that students choose to attend universities where they feel comfortable, where there are ‘people like us’ (Bourdieu 1990), and, as Read et al. (2003) have demonstrated, post-1992 institutions are commonly envisaged as being places that non-traditional students will ‘fit into’ and feel they ‘belonged’. The authors also document the way in which non-traditional students are ‘put off’ by the image of elite universities, writing of the way in which Oxbridge was perceived to be a place in which the typical student ‘was the type of person you had to have a Mum and Dad as multimillionaires and live in a mansion’ (Read et al., 2003: 267).

With regard to UK university admissions, research demonstrates that prospective students who apply to Russell Group Universities from lower social class origins, from ethnic minority backgrounds and from state schools are more likely to be rejected than their middle-class counterparts, even when social differences and prior academic attainment have been taken into account (Shiner and Modood 2002; Zimdars et al., 2009). In a recent quantitative study, Boliver (2013) drew

upon data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) during the period 1996–2006 in order to explore the notion of ‘fair access’ to the UK’s prestigious Russell Group universities. Boliver’s analysis not only found that access to Russell Group universities is far from being fair but that ‘unfair access is shown to take different forms for different social groups’ (Boliver 2013: 343). For example, Boliver’s study found that state school applicants ‘need to be better qualified than their private school counterparts by as much as an A-grade A-level before they are as likely to apply to Russell Group universities’ (Boliver 2013: 359); and when state school applicants do apply to Russell Group universities they appear to need to be better educationally qualified than their privately educated peers ‘by as much as a B-grade A-level before they are as likely to receive offers of admission’ (Boliver 2013: 359). Similarly, when controlling for basic characteristics, applicants of Black Caribbean/African, Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Indian origin are less than one-quarter, one-third and two-thirds respectively as likely to receive admission offers when compared to their white counterparts. Thus: ‘the headline conclusion of the analysis is that access to Russell Group universities is far from “fair”’ (Boliver 2013: 358).

Working-Class Students and Spatial (Im)mobility

In recent years, the increase in non-traditional students choosing to attend university in the UK has been mirrored by an increasing number of students choosing to attend their local university and reside at their parental home throughout the duration of their university career (Christie 2007; Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005). Thus the family as an accommodation resource for university students has gained increasing scholarly attention and, as this research shows, living at home whilst attending university is an increasingly classed

phenomenon. Students from lower socio-economic classes, or students whose parents have not attended university, are more likely to make the choice to stay at home (Frenette 2006; Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005), whereas in many middle-class families with a family history of higher education participation there is the expectation that students will move out of the family home and away to university. This experience is a valued and accepted aspect of the university experience (Allatt 1993).

The disadvantages associated with living at home whilst at university are well documented. Students who live at home compete on an unlevel playing field with their geographically mobile peers as their enrollment and participation at university is bound up with issues of class- and place-based processes 'in the matching of students, institutions, and courses' (Christie 2007: 2447). It is inevitable that living at home whilst attending university restricts the choice of institutions and courses. Moreover, it is argued that students who live at home are disadvantaged in their student experience owing to restricted opportunities to engage in student life activities because of the financial expense and the time it take to commute (Brooks 2002; Furlong and Forsyth 2000). Holdsworth (2009) argues that working-class students who live at home whilst at university struggle to find a space in which they belong, in that they are constantly transitioning through the two differing worlds of university and home life; as a consequence, they often become cut off and isolated from both. Contrastingly, Abrahams and Ingram (2013) found that, for working-class students, living at home was both problematic and beneficial. Whilst on the one hand it enabled students to remain connected to their home locality and communities, affording the students a firm basis from which they were able to overcome the conflict of being 'a fish out of water' at university, doing so also made the process of social

mobility somewhat more conflicting. Nevertheless, much of the literature recognises that students from working-class backgrounds who have a family history of leaving school and gaining paid work may choose to stay at home throughout their university career as it affords them ‘the emotional security of remaining close to family and friends’ (Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005: 82) whilst they partake in the unfamiliar and ‘risky’ world of higher education (Archer et al., 2007; Pugsley 2004; Reay 2001).

However, the extent to which one *freely* chooses to stay at home can be questioned. Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005) found that of the students who reported living with parents the overwhelming majority (78 per cent) stated that they did so for financial reasons. Sociological studies demonstrate that individuals from less affluent backgrounds and ethnic minority backgrounds ‘have no choice but to live at home and attend a local university’ (Christie 2005: 2447), as such individuals are more debt adverse than their middle-class counterparts (Ball et al., 2002; Callender and Jackson 2005). The suggestion here is not only that working-class and ethnic minority students are less likely to participate in higher education in the first place but that they are financially limited in their ability to choose whether they want to move away or live at home whilst attending university. ‘Economic expediency is a significant factor influencing students’ decision to stay local’ (Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005: 88).

The issues of spatial (im)mobility for working-class university students is an issue less pronounced throughout the Western world, as British students are not representative of Western norms in terms of spatial mobility for undergraduate university study (Holdsworth 2006). In the US, for example, students are far less likely to leave home and thus home-based students are not accorded the stigma

that their UK-based counterparts carry (Mulder and Clark 2000). Similarly, Holdsworth (2006) highlights the way in which geographically relocating for university in France is the exception as opposed to the rule, whereas in Canada research demonstrates that students from lower-income families are less likely to attend university if they live beyond a reasonable commuting distance (Frenette 2006). Thus, the picture is a complex one.

Higher Education and the Extra-Credential Experiences of Working-Class Students

There is consensus among university students that a degree is no longer enough to secure graduate employment (Tomlinson 2008). Economic globalisation and mass higher education has altered the landscape of the graduate labour market, with competition being fiercer than ever before. Brown (2003) has coined the term ‘opportunity trap’ to refer to the phenomenon whereby individuals are required to succeed in terms of acquiring academic credentials while at the same time the labour market cannot provide enough jobs that match individuals’ skill sets. He argues that we are in a period of ‘educational stagflation’ and that, ‘as opportunities for education increase, they are proving harder to cash in’ (Brown 2003: 149-50). Consequently, the discourse of graduate employability has shifted from cognitive and academic ability to non-credential abilities and successes such as behavioural competence and performative ability (Brown and Hesketh 2004). As a result, securing graduate employment is increasingly dependent upon one’s ability to capitalize upon attendance within higher education (Tomlinson 2008) through the mobilization of cultural, economic and social capital (Bathmaker et al., 2013). However, as research demonstrates (Redmond 2006, Stevenson and Clegg 2010, Bathmaker et al., 2013), students from different social backgrounds differ ‘in their capacity and orientation towards mobilizing additional experience into valuable capitals in the transition

to the labour market' (Bathmaker et al., 2013: 726). It is in this vein that Lehmann raises the question of why 'extra-credential experiences [are] so unevenly distributed' (Lehmann 2012: 205).

Stuber (2009), exploring class, culture and participation in the American collegiate curriculum, argues that participation is 'structured by students' class backgrounds', which shape their 'dispositions toward and pathways into involvement' (Stuber 2009: 886). Simply put, Stuber argues that US working-class students did not value extra-credential experiences and that their omission from such activities was the result of their own choices, as opposed to a lack of financial or social resources. Similarly, Walpole (2003), exploring the impact of socio-economic status upon the student experience in the USA, found that students from low socio-economics groups were less likely to participate in student societies and clubs but were more likely to spend their time in paid employment. Over half of students from low socio-economic groups reported working either more than sixteen hours per week or full time, compared to 37 per cent of students from high socio-economic backgrounds.

With regard to unequal access to valuable extra-credential experiences, Bathmaker et al. (2013) found that middle-class students were more successful than their working-class peers in accessing internships, especially with regard to elite occupations such as banking and law. Nearly two and a half times the number of students from middle-class families had secured internships compared with those students from working-class backgrounds. Such disparity could not be explained by differential academic attainment or desires; many of the working-class students were achieving academically and exhibited aspirations of securing an internship. Rather, such disparity was, in general, down to 'middle-class social capital advantage' (Bathmaker et al., 2013: 737).

By drawing upon their social network and ‘significant connections’, ‘pulling strings’ and ‘capitalis[ing] on “favours”’ (Bathmaker et al., 2013: 737) middle-class students were able to ensure access to the most prestigious internships. Moreover, research demonstrates that where middle-class students routinely draw upon economic capital in order to finance overseas or unpaid internships as well as to supplement the cost of everyday living, a lack of economic capital served to bar working-class students from accessing much-sought-after internships and work experiences (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Lehmann 2012). The need to work outside of term time to generate an income to finance a university education further obstructs working-class students’ ability to participate in volunteer or career-related work experience. Not only do working-class students partake in term time employment on a greater scale than their middle-class peers and work longer hours but casual, income-supporting employment undertaken alongside university has shown to not be of benefit to future graduate careers (Moreau and Leathwood 2006). Moreover, students who work alongside university study are more likely to cite negative rather than positive effects. Research shows that students who work in term time skip seminars and lectures, spend significantly less time studying and preparing for assignments, use the library less and experience higher levels of fatigue and stress, all of which compound to affect attainment (Curtis and Shani 2002; Metcalf 2003; Moreau and Leathwood 2006). In addition, the more hours’ students work, the higher is the probability of the aforementioned effects (Callender 2008).

Research demonstrates that students’ extra-credential experiences – or, rather, lack of – often results in their career goals being modified. For example, Lehmann (2012) found that whilst 50 per cent of working-class students entered university with the desire to pursue high-status professions such as law or

medicine, this figure dropped to less than 20 per cent by the end of their undergraduate university career. Recognising that admissions officers for professional schools and employers require applicants to bring with them an array of work and voluntary experience as “evidence of leadership” [and a] “demonstration of above-average non-academic qualities” (Lehmann 2012: 205), and draw upon such experiences when seeking to distinguish one candidate from the next, many students realigned their career plans. Whilst it can be argued that attendance at university affords students the opportunity to acquire valuable social capital through novel friendships and acquaintances and that these may open up access to work experience, the value of this is questioned by Lehmann’s data. The working-class students’ well-connected middle-class counterparts carefully sought to guard their connections, ‘further limiting access for working-class students who might otherwise benefit from new relationships and social capital they form at university’ (Lehmann 2012: 211–14). As Bathmaker et al. (2013) found, social capital is deeply entrenched within the family networks of the middle-classes. Working-class students are aware of the value of social and economic capital and expressed concerns regarding their lack of networks and its effect upon their future careers; they were open about what they ‘perceived as an unfair relationship between skill and connections’ (Lehmann 2012: 211). They were ‘often aware of the advantages of their middle-class peers’ (Bathmaker et al., 2013: 738–9), who took such opportunities for granted, ‘lack[ed] recognition of their privileged position [... and] consider[ed] such opportunity their entitlement’ (Bathmaker et al., 2013: 737-8). However, as Bathmaker et al. (2013) conclude, ‘simple awareness of differential capacities for developing, and importantly mobilising, social capital did not help working-class students compensate for their lack of privilege’ (Bathmaker et al., 2013: 239).

The Socio-Cultural Experiences of Working-Class Students in Western Higher Education

Over the past few decades there has been a proliferation of scholarly research that has sought to explore the socio-cultural experiences of working-class persons in a variety of university settings (Dews and Law 1995; Lawler 1999; Ostrove 2003; Ryan and Sackrey 1984; Tokarczyk and Fay 1993). This research demonstrates that working-class students often occupy the position of cultural outsider; they do not share the culture, norms or experiences characteristic of the overly middle-class sphere of the university, which leads to a lack of academic and social integration (Granfield 1991; 1992; Kaufman and Feldman 2004; Lehmann 2007b; Reay et al., 2009, 2010; Rubin 2012). They have a lower sense of belonging within university (Ostrove and Long 2007), are less socially integrated than their middle-class counterparts (Rubin 2012) and find themselves at odds and unable to connect with their wealthy peers (Aries and Seider 2005), yet feel disconnected from their family and cultural background (Lee and Kramer 2013; Wentworth and Peterson 2001). Socio-economic status is powerfully connected to every aspect of student satisfaction, with 'its strongest effects on completion of the bachelor's degree' (Astin 1993: 407). What is evidenced in this literature is not only the psychosocial cost of attending university for working-class students but the way in which such costs are more acute for working-class students who study at elite universities. Researchers from Australia and the UK in a study exploring the experience of individual mobility as a result of attending university found that working-class students at elite universities were subject to numerous dilemmas that their middle- and working-class peers at elite and new universities respectively were not. This, the authors argue, was due to the 'change in lifestyle and social network' (Jetten et al., 2008: 876) that participation in an elite and overwhelmingly middle-class

academic environment entails. It is thus the psychosocial experiences of working-class students at elite universities that this section focuses upon.

In probing the reciprocal relationship between university experience and class identity, US academics Aries and Seider explored the university experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds at a public and an elite private university. The authors found that working-class students at the elite private university were often ‘intimidated by the wealthy students’ (Aries and Seider 2005: 428), that they felt socially powerless owing to a lack of financial resources, which restricted their ability to socialise with wealthier peers, and that differences in taste and preferences placed divisions between working-class students and their wealthier counterparts. The working-class students of Aries and Seider’s study who attended the elite private university evidenced feelings of ‘intimidation, discomfort, inadequacy, and deficiency’ (Aries and Seider 2005: 439), resulting in feelings of exclusion and powerlessness. Such findings, the authors contend, were less prevalent among the working-class students at the public university because they were not overwhelmingly ‘surrounded by highly affluent students’ (Aries and Seider 2005: 430) and thus class-based differences were not salient. Similarly, UK academics Reay et al. (2009, 2010), exploring the experiences of working-class students at an elite UK university, found that there were concerns about social difference; the socially limited space of the elite university led to feelings of being out of place, which led some to consider dropping out of university. Similarly, feelings of alienation among working-class first-generation students in Lehmann’s Canadian study resulted in their dropping out of university. Not ‘fitting in’ and not being able to relate were core reasons cited by working-class students for withdrawing from university (despite their academic success), whereas the middle-class students who withdrew ‘were

forced to leave university because of academic failure' (Lehmann 2007b: 101). The disjuncture between the students' academic dispositions and their working-class backgrounds served to further compound the students' university experiences. Thus, working-class students at university, as Lehmann so eloquently writes, 'face unique challenges of reconciling the conflict between social mobility, class loyalty and class "betrayal"' (Lehmann 2009: 632), a phenomena conceptualized as 'the hidden injuries of class' (Sennett and Cobb 1972).

Similarly, Granfield's (1991; 1992) study of working-class students at Harvard Law School found that although the working-class students entered the elite institution with an abundance of class pride they nevertheless experienced class stigma. The working-class students of Granfield's study experienced differentness and marginality within the elite environment and soon came to regard their working-class background as a burden. They felt that they lacked the required cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986; 1989), manners, values, attire and experiences exhibited by their wealthier peers and were frequently embarrassed by their trouble in seeking to draw upon the elaborated speech code (Bernstein 1977). Moreover, Granfield found that 'attempts to remain situated in the working class ... not only separated these students from the entire law school community but alienated them from groups that shared their ideological convictions' (1991: 339). What is unique about Granfield's study is the way in which he approaches the students' experiences from the perspective of stigma. Despite Goffman's contention that 'lower class persons are [...] likely on occasion to find themselves functioning as stigmatized individuals' (Goffman 1963: 173), few studies have sought to explore working-class students' experiences of university from such a perspective. Much of the literature

exploring this phenomenon has done so from a Bourdieusian perspective and, although this research is sociologically illuminating in its own right, it is Granfield's appropriation of stigma management that I wish to take stock of.

Granfield applies Goffman's (1963) thesis of stigma management and found that, in order 'to escape the taint' (Granfield 1991: 348) and stigma of a working-class background, impression management was continuously drawn upon as an accommodation strategy. The social uniqueness of the students was concealed with working-class representations sacrificed and upper-class forms of dress and behaviour adopted so as to 'escape feeling discredited' (Granfield 1991: 339). Granfield found that, in order to fit in and be accepted, the working-class students were required to 'disengage from their backgrounds' (Granfield 1991: 339) and thus pass as members of the elite community. Granfield's work is insightful, for it also sought to bring attention to the fact that, in order to 'fit in' with the milieu of the elite university, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds must change, or at least present themselves as having changed. This issue is an enduring one, with Reay arguing that 'education is not about the valorization of working-classness but its erasure' (Reay 2001: 334), for it is a system that values 'middle rather than working-class cultural capital' (Reay 2001: 334) and success within it thus requires the sacrifice of a 'working-classness' and the accumulation of 'middle-classness'. Granfield illuminates the way in which students were not only encouraged by university staff but actively required to engage in the elite presentation of self, concealing their working-class background in order to cultivate favourable impressions and thus succeed in interviews for prestigious graduate jobs. The students were told, as Granfield writes, 'that unless they downplayed their social class background, the most lucrative opportunities would be denied them' (Granfield 1991: 341). Thus, the

application process served as a way in which recruiters were able to legitimately socially screen candidates in their attempts to distinguish those who would fit with the social status of the firm and its clientele, rather than necessarily having the required occupational and academic competency. The ability to ‘fit into’ prestigious law firms has been shown to have significant importance (Abel 1989 cited in Granfield 1991), and, as previous research has demonstrated, employers reward those who resemble themselves (Kanter 1977 cited in Granfield 1991).

Theory and Method

Theoretically, much research exploring working-class students’ experiences of higher education has been informed by a Bourdieusian approach. Bourdieu’s metaphors of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital and his conceptual tool of habitus are evident within the discourses of higher education research. They have provided a framework for exploring the way in which, within higher education, social reproduction is transmitted strategically through family intergenerational reproduction, specifically through the mobilization of valued capitals in order to enhance students position within the graduate labour market. In relation to the psychosocial experiences of working-class students at university, Lehmann argues that the concept of cultural capital is an important theoretical tool in understanding ‘the ease with which those who possess it navigate university life and the symbolic violence felt by those whose cultural capital does not live up to the expectations of academia’ (Lehmann 2013: 3). In addition, Bourdieu’s notion of habitus has been utilized to explore the experience of social mobility by elucidating the way in which working-class students experience university and the constant transition between their working-class home and the middle-class environment of an elite university. As Bourdieu

argues, habitus refers to an ‘acquired system of generative schemes ... appearing durably installed’ (Bourdieu 1990: 52) that orientates individuals to their social world; it emphasizes internalized and unconscious dispositions that are the result of one’s life history and class condition (Bourdieu 1977; 1990). It ‘is endlessly transformed either in a direction that reinforces it ... or in a direction that transforms it’ (Bourdieu 1990: 116). It is in this vein that literature within the sociology of higher education has utilised Bourdieu’s notion of habitus and, to a lesser extent, his notion of ‘cleft-habitus’ when seeking to explore the mismatching of dispositions that have been acquired through early life experience with dispositions generated as the result of the novel social experience of attending university.

Furthermore, to a lesser extent Goffman’s perspective of dramaturgy and his presentation of self-thesis have been applied when exploring the university experiences of working-class students. One notable exception is Granfield’s (1991; 1992) study of stigma management. Granfield (1991) found that, in order “to escape the taint” (Granfield 1991: 348) and stigma of a working-class background impression management was continuously drawn upon as an accommodation strategy. The student’s social uniqueness, for example was concealed with working-class representations being sacrificed and upper-class forms of dress and behaviour adopted so as to “escape feeling discredited” (Granfield 1991: 339). Granfield’s work is illuminating in that it theorizes individuals’ changes brought about through attending an elite university as occurring at the level of the surface and being nothing more than the act of presentational management, as opposed to changes occurring at the level of the psyche. Reflected in this work is the way in which working-class students are

required to project an elite presentation of self in order to fit into the milieu of the elite university and succeed in interviews for graduate jobs.

The Role of Bourdieusian Social Theory Within my Thesis

Throughout this research a Bourdieusian theoretical framework will be drawn upon to in order to facilitate the exploration of the psychosocial. As Ingram has noted Bourdieu's conceptual tool of habitus "is particularly useful for theorizing the misalignment of dispositions and practices acquired through early life experiences growing up in a working-class culture, with dispositions generated through new life experiences" (2011: 289). Specifically, within the context of this research it relates to the early life experience of growing up in a working-class family and thus internalizing working-class culture and the experience of attending an elite university. In seeking to elucidate habitus Bourdieu (1977: 72 cited in Ingram 2011) writes:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures.

Thus, Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus in structuring forces of one's life experiences refer to ones "acquired system of generative schemes.... [that appear] durably installed" (Bourdieu 1990: 52). It is the habitus that directs the way in which we "perceive, judge, and act in the world" (Wacquant 1998: 220).

Though habitus is a highly idiosyncratic concept (for everyone has differing life experiences and thus differing schemata's directing action and thought) Bourdieu also argues that common social structures generates a modality of dispositions. Individuals, Bourdieu asserts attain systems of perception in relation to those groups in which they belong to (Bourdieu 1990) therefore, those individuals that share a similar social background will too share a similar habitus.

As Bourdieu argues:

Since the history of the individual is never anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his group or class, each individual system of dispositions may be seen as a structural variant of all the other group or class habitus, expressing the difference between trajectories and positions inside or outside the class. (Bourdieu 1977: 86 cited in Ingram 2011)

Through drawing upon the tool of habitus an 'acquired system of generative schemes...appearing durably installed' (Bourdieu 1990: 52) that orient individuals to their social world I propose to further understand sociologically how class, gender and raced dispositions are (or are not) restructured through the novel social experience of attending and elite UK university. In addition, habitus is especially useful because "one of the crucial features of habitus is that it is embodied" (Reay 2004: 432) and so therefore not only includes ones' mental attitudes or perception but is also expressed through durable ways "of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking" (Bourdieu, 1990: 70). It is in this vein that the concept of habitus illuminates the way in which the embodied inscription of one's history has a deep-seated influence; is elucidates how even when the social mobile individual's conscious presentation of self may align with the preferences of those that mobility has brought them into contact

with elements of their bodily ‘hexis’ (taste, posture, accent, vocabulary) may always bear the trace of their social-class origin (Bourdieu 1977). Thus, it is in this way that the concept of habitus will enable me to explore the way in which social-class is embodied and expressed. Moreover, habitus enables me to explore the multifaceted ways in which students not only possess different dispositions when at elite university and when at home but how such dispositions are differentiated through their embodiments of these dispositions.

Much of the dynamism of habitus is the result of its interconnection with Bourdieu’s relational notion of field (Reay 1994). According to Bourdieusian social theory social formations are structured around a multifaceted group of social fields in which rules, regularities and authorities operate (Bourdieu 1993). For Bourdieu (1984 cited in Moi 1991: 1021, a field is ‘a space in which a game takes place [*espace de jeu*], [it is] a field of objective relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake’. A field consists of ‘a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power’ (Wacquant 1992: 16) or more simply put a ‘competitive system of social relations which functions according to its own specific logic or rules’ (Moi 1991: 1020-1021). The relationship between habitus and field is a dialectic one, “it operates in two ways” (Bourdieu 1992: 127). On one side there is a relationship of *conditioning*; a flow of stimulus from the field to the habitus, as Bourdieu argues, the “field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of a field” (Bourdieu 1992: 127). In the other direction, there is a “relation of knowledge or *cognitive construction*” (Bourdieu 1992: 127), the habitus can influence the way in which ones perceives the field in which he or she finds herself in. In writing on the misalignment

between habitus and field Bourdieu (2002: 31) argues that “where dispositions encounter conditions (including fields) different from those in which they were constructed and assembled, there is a ‘dialectical confrontation’ between habitus as structured structure, and objective structures”.

Recent research has sought to call into question the postulation that that Bourdieu’s theory of habitus is “part of a straightforward theory of social reproduction” (Ingram 2011: 289) by seeking to explore whether or not habitus can be engendered and restructured within two somewhat irreconcilable fields: the field of social origin (combining family background and social class); and the educational field (encompassing university and peer groups). In such instances when an unfamiliar field is encountered the habitus becomes ‘destabilized’ (Ingram 2011) for “it is caught in a tug between two conflicting social fields” (Ingram 2011: 290). As Ingram (2011) highlights when citing Bourdieu when he writes that:

Habitus is not necessarily adapted to its situation nor necessarily coherent. It has degrees of integration... Thus it can be observed that to contradictory positions, which tend to exert structural “double binds” on their occupants, there often correspond destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering. (Bourdieu 2000: 160 cited in Ingram 2011)

In seeking to elucidate the incongruity between habitus and field Bourdieu argues:

Where dispositions encounter conditions (including fields) different from those in which they were constructed and assembled, there is a “dialectical confrontation” between habitus as structured structure, and objective structures.

In this confrontation, habitus operates as a structuring structure able to selectively perceive and to transform the objective structure according to its own structure while, at the same time, being re-structured, transformed in its makeup by the pressure of the objective structure. (Bourdieu 2005: 46)

Thus, the relationship between habitus and field is one of accommodation; for the habitus can at times be accepting of the new field’s logic, rules and structure and therefore be structured by it, enabling a refashioning in the habitus (Bourdieu 2005). At the same time, the habitus remains to be directed by the forces and dispositions of the field of origin. When the habitus and field are misaligned one may experience feelings of disquiet, insecurity, ambivalence, uncertainty (Reay 2005) and often “the internalization of conflicting dispositions” (Ingram 2011). The latter case, Ingram argues can be conceptualized as a ‘habitus tug’ (Ingram 2011: 45), where “conflicting dispositions struggle for supremacy” (Ingram 2011: 45) leaving the individual feeling as if they are “pulled in different directions” (Ingram 2011: 45) creating a “destabilized habitus” (Bourdieu 1998: 98).

Destabilized Habitus and Higher Education:

Sani (2008) argues that the incongruity between a university of high status and a social background of low status yields a dearth of opportunities to achieve self-affirmation thereby generating feelings of strain and disquiet. Such argument is well-matched with research exploring social class and university choice (Boudon 1974; Paulsen & St. John 2002; Reay 2009). For example, studies have

found that those working-class academically successful individuals that regard their social background as incompatible with higher education are likely to endure “double discrimination” (Jetten et al., 2008: 868). They are rejected by those social groups in which they seek to leave behind as well as of those members of the group in which they seek to enter (Branscombe & Ellemers 1998 and Postmes & Branscombe 2002). In addition, such individuals may feel a “disconnection from their family and cultural backgrounds” (Wentworth and Petterson 2001: 10), a threatened connection to working-class culture (Luttrell 1989, 1997) and feelings of isolation and alienation (Stewart and Ostrove 1993). Further, a study by Jetten, et al. (2008) exploring individual mobility strategies of attending university found that those individuals from lower social economic status were faced with the challenge of “striking a balance between seeking individual mobility and remaining truthful to one’s social background” (Jetten, et al., 2008: 877). The authors maintain that for those working-class educationally successful students breaking with their social background, its culture and practices was a price “too high to pay” (Jetten et al., 2008: 877). It is in this vein that this study seeks to explore the effects of elite university attendance upon participants’ relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends, family member and romantic partners. Specifically, by drawing upon Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and field this study will seek to conceptualize and explain the everyday experiences of working-class students at an elite university as well as examining and explaining the effect(s) of attendance at an elite university upon ties and relationships with friends and family from the student’s home community.

Social Class and Social Mobility within the Thesis

Social Mobility

Within the British sociology of stratification Goldthorpe et al has long dominated the field of social mobility (Friedman 2014). As Friedman notes, much of this work has been dominated by quantitative work that focuses upon mobility *rates* (Breen 2005; Erickson and Goldthorpe 1992; Goldthorpe et al., 1969; Halsey et al., 1980; Marshall et al., 1997). One notable exception includes Goldthorpe's 1974 Oxford Mobility Study follow up, which paid attention, albeit fleetingly, to the subjective dimensions of social mobility. To do so, Goldthorpe (1980) drew upon 246 life-history notes, using a non-probability sub-sample of the original 10,000 respondents (Friedman 2014). What emerged from the aforementioned mobility studies was that social mobility whether upwards or downwards was experience that participants were overly content with. As Goldthorpe writes:

The life history notes of our upwardly mobile respondents indeed suggested that they had not for the most part experienced their mobility as socially stressful and, in particular, problems of managing status discrepancies or of translating occupational into status ascent received very little mention.

(Goldthorpe 1980: 248)

Within British sociology Goldthorpe's mobility studies have occupied somewhat of a central premise within the sociology of stratification and sociology per se with many sociologists of stratification and mobility turning to his work

(Atkinson 2009; Marshall et al., 1997; Saunders 2011; Savage 2000). However, despite this, Friedman recently warned against just uncritical acceptance of such body of research arguing that “research on the mobility experience has not been subject to significant update or critique in the 38 years since it was carried out – either by himself or from others in sociology” (2014: 356). Much work pertaining to social mobility has indeed continued to be in the form of large scale studies that have focused upon the rates of mobility as opposed to how individuals experience it (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Marshall et al., 1997; Saunders, 2011). Notable early exceptions to this include Jackson and Marsden’s (1963) seminal *‘Education and the Working Class’* which, as I have discussed in the former body of this chapter explored the disjunctive experience of educationally successful boys at a grammar school in Huddersfield, here educational success was accompanied by the simulations break away from a working-class culture as a result of the 1944 Education Act and the establishment of the Tripartite System.

Following on from this, the subjective dissociative effects of social mobility have since emerged from within the field of the sociology of education. Lawler (1999) explored the mobility experiences of upwardly mobile women be it through education or marriage. And as I have already discussed within this chapter the work of Mahony and Zmroczek’s (1997) through their publication *‘Class Matters: Working Class Women's Perspectives On Social Class’* has the ambivalent experience(s) of social mobility at its crux. Since then, Ingram (2009, 2011, 2018) has written eloquently of the experience of teenage working-class boys navigating educational success and thus embarking, possibly on a trajectory of social mobility.

Within political and public dominant discourse, social mobility is constructed as an overwhelmingly celebratory, unequivocal and exclusively positive experience that is reliant on the movement away from a working-class to a middle-class social position (Friedman 2014, Reay 2013). This is due to the fact that in twenty first century Britain, as much sociologists content, myself included, that, ‘being working-class’ is positioned as ‘deficient’, ‘valueless’ and something that one should ‘escape’ from (Allen 2014; Loveday 2014, 2015, 2016; Skeggs, 2004; Skeggs and Loveday 2012; Tyler 2008, 2013; Tyler and Bennett 2010); coupled with the tendency for dominant mobility discourses to “collapse ‘achievement’ into measure of economic resources or occupational status” (Friedman 2014: 354). At the heart of the contemporary dominant discourse of social mobility lay the construction higher education as a mechanism by which upward social mobility is to be achieve and thus ‘become middle class’ (Lehmann 2009, 2013; Loveday 2015; Reay 2012, 2013). Which, as many sociologists have highlighted, and as I have discussed throughout the former of this chapter, success within education is “dependent on the abandonment of aspects of working-class background” (Ingram 2011:287) eschewing a working-class identity and peers (Loveday 2014; Reay 2001; Lawler 2000). But what exactly does one mean by being working-class? And What makes somebody working-class within this thesis? This is what I shall now attend to.

A Distillation on Class

Social class has long been at the crux of the sociology of education and sociology per se. As Wright argues “few concepts are more contested in sociological theory

than the concept of class” (2008: 329). Thus, I find it imperative to provide a brief distillation of thought about contemporary sociological understandings of social class. It is brief because, in short, one could write an entire thesis on the concept of social-class.

For somebody starting out in sociology I’d stay ‘stick to your instincts’. When I’ve come across new ideas via new books, papers and so on, sometimes they directly speak to me (for me Marx, feminism, Bourdieu), but sometimes I feel they are instinctively wrong. For instance, [... those that] talk about there being no such thing as class. (Skeggs 2015: 44)

As the above quote from Skeggs alludes to, the theoretical consideration of social class within the discipline of sociology was, and to a degree, still is, subject to claim that individualism has subsequently lead to the ‘death of class’. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim ask:

Are we now witnessing a historic change whereby people are 'released' from the forms of industrial society (class, social layer, occupation, family, marriage) as they were released during the Reformation from the secular domination of the Church? (Beck-Gernsheim 2002:30)

In Risk Society Beck asserts that contemporary society is now one marked by “the individualization of social inequality” (1992: 85), that there has been a shift from collectivism to individualism and thus the decline in traditional structuring forces such as that of social class. Thus, for Beck, class no longer features as a structure force within society, he argues. “we have moved beyond class society”

(Beck 1992: 91). Class, arose within sociology as a ‘zombie category’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) an assertion that Pakulski & Waters (1996), Bauman (1996, 2011) and Giddens (1991) among others supported albeit without consensus from the wider discipline of sociology.

As I have alluded to above, to be working-class is to stake claim to an identity that is ‘deficient’, ‘valueless’ and something that one should ‘escape’ from (Allen, 2014, Loveday 2014, 2015, 2016, Skeggs, 2004, Skeggs and Loveday 2012, Tyler 2008, 2013, Tyler and Bennett 2010). It is perhaps for this reason as to why there exists much dis-identification, ambivalence, confusion and even denial with regards to ‘class labels’ (Savage et al., 2001). Skeggs (1997a) has written on the way in which social class is a structuring absence within individual’s personal narratives, be it of their self or society. In addition, the recent work from the Great British Class Survey has led Savage et al., (2013) to argue that traditional working, middle and upper class categories are no longer relevant owing to changes in the labour structure of society. The gig economy, the erosion of workers’ rights, the rise of zero hour, low paid contracts free from the historical benefits of labourism given way to an emerging and burgeoning new class, that of the precariat (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007; Standing 2011).

Recently, Tyler (2015) in *‘Classificatory Struggles: Class, Culture and Inequality in Neoliberal Times’* has argued that the sociological imagination must not overly concern its self with that class *is* but instead question what class *describes*. As Tyler argues “the problem that the concept of ‘class’ describes is inequality” (2015: 493). As Tyler writes, drawing upon Jodi Dean:

Class, in whatever historical context or popular, technical or political idiom it is communicated (even when that idiom is articulating claims of classlessness), is a recognition of the unequal distribution of resources (economic and symbolic) and the accompanying processes ‘of exploitation, dispossession, and immiseration that produces the very rich as the privileged class that lives off the rest of us (Dean 2012:74 cited in Tyler 2015: 498)

A Bourdieusian Understanding of Social Class within the Thesis

Whilst I recognise that “there are many disagreements between stratification scholars about the right ways to ‘classify class’” (Tyler 2015: 499) I nonetheless adopt a Bourdieusian understanding of social class. For Bourdieu class is a relational concept whereby social classes emerge through struggles against both exploitation and inequality (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu moves away from structural approach to social class and although recognises the role that economics play in defining ones social class he also takes into account the role of other factors that one can capitalise upon within social space. Specifically, the role of social, cultural and symbolic capital in addition to that of economic capital. Bourdieu proposes an understanding of social class based upon the notion of a “three dimensional space” (Bourdieu 1984: 226) to which individuals are positioned and “distributed [in accordance] to the overall capital they possess [and in accordance] to the structure of their capital” (Bourdieu 1989: 17). Specifically, Bourdieu argues:

The social world can be conceived as a multi-dimensional space that can be constructed empirically by discovering the main factors of differentiation which

account for the differences observed in a given social universe, or, in other words, by discovering the powers or forms of capital which are or can become efficient, like aces in a game of cards, in this particular universe, that is, in the struggle (or competition) for the appropriation of scarce goods of which this universe is the site. It follows that the structure of this space is given by the distribution of the various forms of capital, that is, by the distribution of the properties which are active within the universe under study – those properties capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit on their holder (Bourdieu, 1987: 3-4).

In writing of social space, Bourdieu writes that it is:

Defined by the mutual exclusion, or distinction, of the positions which constitute it, that is, as a structure, of juxtaposition of social positions... Social agents, and also things in so far as they are appropriated by them and therefore constituted as properties, are situated in a place in social space, a distinct and distinctive place which can be characterized by the position it occupies relative to other places [...] social space tends to be translated, with more or less distortion, into physical space, in the form of a certain arrangement of agents and properties. (Bourdieu 2000: 134)

For Bourdieu, one's social class position, or rather, one's position in social space is an embodied position (Bourdieu 2000). In *Distinction* (1984) Bourdieu's eloquent "tour de-de-force study of consumer taste and social reproduction" (Holt 1997: 93) he argued that the class hierarchy is marked by cultural preferences located in the habitus. The habitus Bourdieu argues refers to those "acquired system of generative schemes [...] appearing durably installed"

(Bourdieu 1990: 52) and as a result of those meanings “associated with a particular class of conditions of existence” (Bourdieu 1990: 53). It is the habitus that directs the way “we perceive, judge, and act in the world” (Stones 1998: 220) the disposition to behave or think in racist ways for example. The working class, Bourdieu argues, are marked by connotations and dispositions of necessity whilst for the upper class it is distinction. Aesthetic choices, Bourdieu asserts, are made in opposition to other classes, for Bourdieu “taste classifies and it classifies the other” (Bourdieu 1984: 6). Bourdieu understands social class as the result of ‘agents’ who poses varying levels of capital and dispositions within social space.

A Bourdieusian understanding of social class is best suited within this thesis as it allows for a consideration and exploration of the ways in which the working-class, first-generation student participants of this study volume and mix of capitals may change over the course of their elite university education. Thus bringing about a change in their position in social space. This is specifically explored in chapter four and five. In chapter two, I elucidate how I operationalised working-class throughout this study.

Theorising Race within the Thesis

It was in *The Souls of Black Folk* that W. E. B. Du Bois infamously declared that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line” (1903/1997: 45). For Du Bois (1903, 1992), the relationship between histories of colonisation and enslavement alongside the advent and development of capitalism as an economic system consequently meant that the inequality of

social class that proliferates under capitalism is at all times also racialized. Whilst Du Bois was writing over one hundred years ago and despite much change, racial stratification still profoundly shapes contemporary society. However, the role of race in shaping everyday experiences of the social world and the way in which racism plays out in ways that are both overt and covert, every day and extraordinary are not always acknowledged but instead routinely dismissed and downplayed within the contemporary era. The election of Barack Obama in 2008 and then, ten years later the marriage of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry in 2018 are cited in popular rhetoric as examples evidencing a post-racial era free from racism. However, the notion that we are living in a post-race world is a myth and a fallacy and thus there exists the pressing need to talk about race today (Bulmer and Solomos 2018). In relation to the myth of a post-racial society in *White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-Racial Society* Bhopal argues that:

Individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, by virtue of their racial identity, are positioned as outsiders in a society that values whiteness and ‘white privilege’... within a neoliberal context policy making in its attempt to be inclusive has portrayed an image of a post-racial society, when in reality vast inequalities between white and black and minority ethnic communities continue to exist (Bhopal 2018:1).

In *Notes on Theorizing Racism and Other Things* Valluvan and Kapoor (2016: 377) write that “post-race only denotes an ideological ruse by the forces of liberal quietism – for example, the ‘profiteers of race’ who claim we need not do anything about racism as it has been vanquished or only the residual relic of certain bad individuals”. Indeed, the rise of popularist nationalism in both the UK and elsewhere across the ‘global north’ further serves as evidence debunking

the myth that contemporary society is a post-racial one. Recent sociological work by Bhabra (2017) highlights that racism and anti-immigration sentiments were key features in the referendum. It is within this context that it becomes increasingly difficult for claims of a post racial society to be convincingly asserted. But what exactly is race and how is it theorised within this thesis?

In *Race Ends Where? Race, Racism and Contemporary Sociology* Meer and Nayak (2013: 13) reflect on the way in which “race is very much installed in the here and now. It remains ever present in late-modernity and strangely solid in liquid times”. They cite “the resilience of race as a construct for organising social relations and also the slippery fashion in which ideas of race have shifted, transmuted and pluralised... [in evidencing the] vitality of race in the contemporary period” (Meer and Nayak 2013: 13). Thus, sociology has long explored the concept of race considering the way in which race is lived at the level of the private individual and public institutional level. One way in which sociology has conceptualised race is by viewing it as a construction but recognising that racism is real (Miles 1993); sociology has also understood that race pervades the structural in that racist practices pervades institutions (Hall et al 1978). This is the starting point for the way in which race is theorised within this thesis which adopts a British cultural studies approach the theorisation of race.

British cultural studies emerged in the 1960s through the work of Hoggart (1998), Williams (1958), Thompson (1963), and Hall (1967) all of whom were associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which was founded in 1964. In adopting a British cultural studies approach to race this thesis understands “race” to be a pseudo-scientific concept. Race is understood as a socially constructed concept which is upheld by both structures and ideology

with real life implications for individuals not solely in terms of their identity but also with regards to their economic and social relations. Specifically, I draw upon articulations of race as put forward by Stuart Hall (1977, 1978, 1980, 1993, 2002, and 2006) who, as Solomos (2014: 1670) writes “saw himself as working through the conceptual issue of how to make sense of what he defines as economic and sociological approaches to race (Hall 1980)”. As Hall writes:

The break thus constitutes a theoretical rapture, in part or in whole, with each of these dominant tendencies, and a possible restructuring of the theoretical field such as might enable important work of a new kind to begin. For simplification sake, the two tendencies may be called the ‘economic’ and the ‘sociological’. (Hall 2002: 305)

Race, for Hall was a “discursive system, which has “real” social, economic and political conditions of existence and “real” symbolic and material effects” (Hall 2002: 453). Thus, for Hall, race is never entirely ideological nor entirely cultural, but instead “situated in everyday social and economic relations... [and thus] cannot be reduced to other sets of social relations and at the same cannot be fully understood outside of these very same relations” (Solomos 2014: 1670). Hall, in theorising race focuses upon representation, structure and agency (Alexander 2009). In *The Young Englanders*, reflecting on race, Hall writes that:

Race is a collective concept. Essentially, race relations are relations between groups of people rather than individuals; relationships in which the personal exchanges between individuals are mediated through and affected by the whole body of stereotyped attitudes and beliefs which lie between one group and another. (Hall 1967: 3)

In seeking to further elucidate his theorisation of race, Hall writes:

Already the young immigrant is trying to span the gap between Britain and home . . . There is the identity which belongs to the part of him that is West Indian, or Pakistani or Indian . . . there is also the identity of ‘the young Englander’ toward which every new experience beckons . . . somehow he must learn to reconcile his two identities and make them one. But many of the avenues into wider society are closed to him . . . The route back is closed. But so too is the route forward. (Hall 1967: 10-12)

Moreover, just as Hall (1978, 1980) race within this thesis is theorised as a social and historically construed category and one interacts with various other identity categorisations such as class and gender. Hall argued for understandings of race at the micro level to not be dislocated from what Alexander summarises as the “broader issues of social justice and political action and from the historical specificities of the present conjuncture” (Alexander 2009: 474). As Hall argued:

What is the relationship between the mobilisation or performance of racialised and other forms of ethnicity and identity at the local, micro, more ethnographic level and the large thing that brought us into the field at the beginning, namely a racialised world . . . a world in which material and symbolic resources continue to be deeply unequally distributed. Why are you in this field if you are not concerned about that? (Hall cited in Alexander 2009: 475)

Such theorisation of race is best suited within this thesis as it allows for a consideration and exploration of the ways in which the BME, working-class students of this study experience race at the mundane, everyday micro level, but

always within the broader context of economic and social relations. It also enables a nuanced reading of everyday life for the working-class BME students at Stellar University whilst also paying attention to institutional forms of racial discrimination. In reflecting up the power of Hall's theorisation of race, Alexander writes:

Hall's insistence on the historical specificities of racial formation, on its articulation with other forms of identification, on the inseparability of culture from social, economic and political structures and of agency from the wider forces in which they are enmeshed, are insights which retain the power to enlighten, challenge and provoke to illuminate these dark times. (Alexander 2009: 475)

Why So Few Ethnographies of Higher Education?

Despite the now burgeoning field of ethnography as they relate to pre and compulsory education this has not always been the landscape. Ethnographies in education were near non-existent prior to the 1970's and from here on those applying the method of ethnography to the realm of education largely derived from the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, linguists and sociology or those working within PGCE programs within education departments (Delamont 2016). The application of the method of ethnography to the realm of education was largely the results of impassioned scholarly community with a desire to explore classroom processes. As Delamont writes:

What educational research lacked was data on what actually went on behind the classroom door. Too much educational research, we had decided, tested children, or measured their attitudes, before some educational experience, and

again afterwards, with nothing known about the ‘black box’ behind the closed door. We wanted to see what teaching was actually like. (Delamont 2016: 8-9).

Such move resulted in a robust ethnographic tradition from the 1970s onwards as Delamont (2014) details. The cross-disciplinary move to apply the method of ethnography within schools and educational settings, at the time a move that was perceived to be controversial yet brave “is now one of the strengths of British educational research, with its own journal: *Ethnography and Education*” (Delamont 2016: 9-10). Thus, the small number of ethnographies of higher stand in stark contrast to the otherwise thriving and burgeoning array of academics that have studied issues of primary and secondary education from an ethnographic perspective per se both historically (Cusick 1973; Hargreaves 1967; Lacey 1970; Palonsky 1975; Willis 1979) and contemporary (Ingram 2009, 2011; Stahl 2012, 2013, 2015; Ward 2014, 2015). Instead the field of higher education research is largely characterised by document, survey, policy, observational and interview analysis (Tight 2012). The ethnographic imagination (Willis 2000) is rarely casted upon higher education institutions.

There are of course a number of notable exceptions, selective examples of which include Latour and Woolgar’s (1979) *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Roger Guillemin’s anthropological ethnography of the scientific laboratory at the Salk Institute which cast light upon “the way in which the daily activities of working scientists lead to the construction of scientific facts” (1979: 40). Similarly, Knorr-Cetina’s (1983, 1995) studies into the constructivist and contextual nature of scientific knowledge and claims making where in depth observations over a sustained period of time formed a core component. Then there is Bourdieu’s *Homo Academicus*, a sociological “analysis of the academic world” (1988: xi), of which Bourdieu himself is a part of. In *Homo Academicus*

Bourdieu casts light upon French intellectual life through an exploration of the social background and activities of his academic peers. In doing so Bourdieu highlights the interconnection between knowledge and power questioning the various scholarly disciplines, methodologies and intellectual perspectives are credited or discredited through various power mechanisms at work within the social structure of the university (Fisher 1990).

With regards to the student experience of higher education, in 1989 Mofatt an anthropologist and professor authored an insightful ethnography of undergraduate life at Rutgers University entitled '*Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture*'. Mofatt conducted fieldwork between the period of 1977 – 1987 and documented the everyday life in the dorms of a typical American state university in the 1980's Mofatt provided invaluable insight into both student and American culture per se. Contemporary ethnographies of higher education include Smalls' '*My Freshman Year What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*' (2006) then published under the pseudonymous name Rebekah Nathan. A professor of anthropology at a large state university and an overseas ethnographer and anthropologist by training with over fifteen years' higher education teaching experience Small became puzzled by the behavior of her students questioning their levels of motivation and continuously asking herself "Where we like that? Are students totally different? Doesn't it seem like they're... cheating more? ruder? Less motivated? More steeped in their sense of entitlement?" (Nathan 2006:2). The impetus for the research came when Small audited colleagues courses and subsequently found herself privy to a world that her own students seldom shared with her. Fascinated, Small subsequently found herself taking notes, observing and thus 'doing ethnography' and in June 2002 Small applied to study at university with only high school grades, accepted she

subsequently signed up to a campus meal plan and central on campus dormitory housing. The yearlong ethnography cast light upon student experiences of college life, upon the misperceptions, misunderstandings, and mistakes that affect the college experience in negative ways, the challenges facing America's colleges and upon the political, economic, and cultural significance of higher education in America. *My Freshman Year* is thus a methodological illustration of the sometimes opportunistic nature of ethnography.

In a similar vein, Tuchman's (2009) *Wannabe U: Inside the Corporate University*, a sociological six-year study based upon interviews with faculty administrators and academics and observations of campus life that encompass presidential addresses to mundane faculty meetings and everything in between so as to explore the corporatisation of higher education in America. Most recently, Pereira's *Power Knowledge and Feminist Scholarship: An Ethnography of Academia* (2017) which draws upon over a decade of data collected in Portugal, the UK, US and Scandinavia in order to explore the status of feminist scholarship in academia. As Pereira writes, the ethnography "explores some of the most significant questions in feminist epistemology: how do academics demarcate what constitutes 'proper' academic knowledge? And to what extent is feminist theory and research recognised as such?" (Pereira 2012: 283).

Despite the aforementioned ethnographies of higher education (all of which have been selected as illustrative examples and thus should not be read as a comprehensive inventory) few ethnographers have turned their academic ethnographic eye around on the institutions of which one operates within and out of; few have turned the intellectual enquiring gaze around onto their occupational home. Why exactly this is I am not sure, surprisingly few have

commentated on the possibilities and pitfalls hypothetical or otherwise. Of those who have conducted ethnographic research of higher education institutions whichever their frame few have chronicled their personal and methodological experience of doing so beyond an appendix in the back pages of a monograph. What is however evident from such commentaries is the fact that universities are rich sites of academic study, as Pereira writes reflecting upon her feminist ethnography of academia: “Academic communities make excellent objects of study. Even in the simplest academic interaction, there is often much happening” (Pereira 2017: 8).

However, it is in this same vein that Pereira also writes that “doing ethnographic research with, and of, one’s peers is not something that academics often do” (Pereira 2017: 7) and it is herein that feelings of ambivalence, confusion and contradiction is evidence by ethnographers of higher education. It seems that conducting an ethnography of a higher education institution is not without its dilemmas, epistemological, methodological, moral, ethical or otherwise. For example, Loveday doctoral research conducted at Goldsmiths, University of London explored “the different ways in which working-class identities are experienced performed and articulated in Higher Education” (Loveday 2011: 3). Initially, Loveday had hoped that the thesis would have been ethnographic, though due to her position as an employee at Goldsmiths. However, subsequent conflicts arose as a result of her dual positionality as a researcher and employee of the same educational institution. As Loveday writes:

I was finding it increasingly difficult to separate out what I saw as two distinct ‘roles’, and I found it confusing attempting to delimit my position: “am I at work now, or am I doing my PhD research?” When I say ‘conflict’ I do not

mean to suggest that there was any tension between myself and the other members of Open Book, who have been nothing but supportive of my intentions to carry out research amongst them. This ‘conflict’ was more an internal quandary for me, as I became increasingly anxious about the potential ethical implications of occupying both positions simultaneously. In particular, I was concerned that in their interactions with me as their colleague or friend, the research participants would not always be aware that I was researching them, noting down their comments or actions, storing away information to later integrate into the thesis. I began to consider the possibility that an ethnography of the group was not going to be the best method in this case – either ethically, or in terms of the production of ‘knowledge’ (Loveday 2011: 33).

It is in this vein as to why Loveday drew upon life stories as the primary research method with participants from working-class backgrounds whom work or study in higher education as opposed to the method of ethnography. Despite the emerging although somewhat speckled presence of higher education ethnographies there exists no concerted ethnography that seeks to explore the experiences of working-class, first-generation students at a UK elite university, and it is this lacuna that my research seeks to address.

Chapter 2. Methods and Moments: An Ethnographer's Toolkit and Tales

Introduction

Sitting on the veranda of the Monash Center in Prato taking five from their writing two doctoral researchers reflect upon their time spent in the field. Over coffee they discuss their experience of conducting ethnographic research within two elite UK educational institutions (one a secondary school the other a university). Reflecting upon the epistemological, methodological, ethical and political dilemmas inherent within their research, among much else, Carli asked: *“Do you think they let you in cos you look posh?”*. *“Do you think they let you in because you’re not?”* Iro asked.

Within the above interaction, whilst attending a social sciences writing workshop at the Monash University Prato Centre in Italy during the summer of 2017 two doctoral students critically upon the methodological themes and issues that have been central to their fieldwork and doctoral journey per se. In doing so, they considered their methodological ‘aha’ and ‘eureka’ moments: their “experiences of deep insight and inspiration, of meaning-making, of embodied passion and of excitement” (Simovska et al., 2017: 1), alongside the twists and turns, dead-ends and yellow brick roads of their research theory and practice. It is this “tapestry of methodology” (Gagnon 2016) that I present throughout this chapter. I begin by elucidating my decision to undertake a feminist ethnography of working-class students at an elite university in the United Kingdom. I then outline my ethnographic methodological toolkit: identifying when, how, and

with whom my empirical material was produced; paying attention to how my commitment to ethical research and confidentiality – together with the personal, the political, the temporal and, unexcitingly, the practical – shaped the formation of this doctoral research design; time spent in the field and the writing up of the research. In *The Ethnographic Self*, Coffey argues that that “it is vital to recognize the ways in which identities, roles and relationships can pervade fieldwork” (1999: 5). Thus, it is in this vein that this chapter is drawn to a conclusion with an explicit, critical consideration of my experience of conducting an ethnography of working-class students at an elite university as a working-class student at an elite university.

A Feminist Ethnography of Working-class Students at an Elite University

From the outset of my doctoral journey I have been sociologically and politically committed to exploring the experiences of first-generation, working-class students at an elite UK university. Specifically, on a macro level I am concerned with contributing to sociological understandings of social class re/production within education. On a micro level I am concerned with the emotional politics of class as experienced by working-class, first-generation undergraduate students at an elite university. To explore these issues, I have engaged with issues pertaining to: the politics of belonging in elite UK higher education, the effects of elite higher education upon working-class, first-generation students ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends, family and romantic partners; and the everyday experiences of social class and social mobility in flux through formal higher education. Specifically, four research questions guide this research project:

1. What are the everyday lived experiences of working-class students at an elite university? In what ways are such experiences gendered and, if possible to say, raced?
2. What is the effect of attendance at an elite university upon ties and relationships with friends and family from the student's home community?
3. In what ways do working-class students at an elite university understand and narrate their classed identity? Do participants perceive social mobility through formal education a) as being possible, and b) as a desirable ideal and one that they strive for?

The above research questions and the conceptual framework underpinning the project guide the research method. As Stanley and Wise (1983: 159) argue, “methods themselves aren’t innately anything” and to quote Oakley (1998: 742) “the critical question remains the appropriateness of the method to the research question”. Such insights are best accessed through the method of ethnography and so I conducted a feminist ethnography of working-class at an elite university. Specifically, I see my ethnographic research located within the field of educational, sociological and cultural feminist ethnography (Hey 1997; Skeggs 1997; Willis 1977). Just as Pereira (2011, 2013) I regard this research as ethnography due to the fact that it was:

Conducted over a prolonged period of time, utilizing different research techniques; conducted within the setting of the participants, with an understanding of how the context informs the action; involving the researcher in participation and observation; involving an account of the development of

the relationship between the researcher and the researched and focusing on how experience and practice are part of a wider process (Skeggs 2007: 426).

However, as Skeggs also notes,

feminist researchers in general and those who do ethnography are not a homogeneous group. Different questions to be asked, disciplinary locations, theoretical investments as well as different political aims all inform the shape that the ethnography will take. All feminist research is related to wider political positions. (Skeggs 2007: 430).

Thus, defining ‘feminist ethnography’ is unattainable given the different historical routes, disciplinary intersections and trajectories that have shaped its conceptualisation(s). Ethnography and its associated early writings were a legitimating source of colonial endeavor through its investigations, classification and knowledge about ‘others’ (Clifford, 1983, 1986). As Skeggs notes, ethnography “has been strongly framed by colonialism and heterosexuality. The tradition of the heterosexual couple—him the distinguished anthropologist, her the interested and helpful wife, travelling to distant continents to spend years living in a ‘culture’ in order to understand it” (2007: 427). My research marks a sharp break from the early practice of ethnography in that I, as the researcher did not travel to distant locales to conduct research, nor did I immerse myself within an alien culture. Instead, my field site, participants and foci of enquiry was close to home. As I discuss throughout the discussion that follows.

Feminists seldom ascribe to one ‘feminist methodology’. Instead feminist researchers craft political stances from feminism per se, applying them to the research process in both theory and practice. It is these researchers’ political and ethical proscriptions that renders research feminist. One notable way in which feminism is present within and throughout my thesis is through the way in which my research practice mirrors conceptualisations of feminist methodology, particularly in relation to questions of ethics. Skeggs argues that “feminist ethnography is always informed by feminist ethics” (2007: 437). My research practice is concerned with the feminist ethical principles of reciprocity, honesty, accountability, responsibility, reflexivity and equality throughout all stages of the research (Letherby 2003) – from its initial conception to the final act of dissemination. Beyond this, and in seeking to further explicitly elucidate the way(s) in which my research practice is feminist, uniting characteristics of feminist methodology includes: a) the importance of research illuminating, critiquing and transforming power dynamics on both a micro and macro level, b) whilst also paying attention to power dynamics inherent within the research process, and c) the importance of thinking reflectively when doing so. Finally, in-line with a feminist method of research, my thesis seeks to ‘give voice’ deploying a method of ethnography that emphasises and empathises with the experiences, words and voices of participants. Thus enabling what bell hooks (1989) terms a “view from below”. It is in these fundamental ways that my thesis can be read as being part of a wider wave of research practice that repositions ethnography as a colonial methodological tool drawn upon to oppress to a method of emancipation and liberatory strategy. However, my thesis marks a break from one of the earliest proscriptions that asserted that feminist research should be for women, based upon women and should seek to emancipate only women from the conditions that oppressed them (Griffin 1980; Roberts 1981; McRobbie

1982; Stanley and Wise 1983) and also includes the experiences of men, albeit all of whom are cisgendered and heterosexual.

Into the Field: When, How, and With Whom?

An ethnography of working-class undergraduate students at an elite university is a powerful resource for exploring the way in which social class operates in austerity Britain. Exploring what class means to individuals, how they come to experience and embody social class through the minutia of the everyday, and the way in which the material, social, cultural and psychological (and much else) shapes one's lived experience of class. As Reay (1998: 272) argued two decades ago:

Class is a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, the psychological predispositions and the sociological dispositions that quantitative work on class location and class identity cannot hope to capture... what is required are British-based ethnographic examinations of how class is 'lived' in gendered and raced ways to complement the macro versions that had monopolized our ways of envisaging social class for far too long.

Fieldwork consisted of an eighteen-month long ethnography conducted between April 2015 and October 2016. The key site of my research where I undertook ethnographic fieldwork was at a university campus and its surrounding locality. My ethnographic tool kit consisted of a) participant and non-participant observation, b) interviews, c) photo elicitation, d) walking and driving tours, and e) documentary analysis. Interviews and observations (both participant and non-participant) took place in a myriad of contexts and situations both "within school and beyond the gate" to echo the phrase of Ingram (2011). These methods are

discussed in detail below but for clarity: In total I conducted twenty-seven initial interviews with working-class, first generation undergraduate students, a series of follow up interviews with sixteen of the initial working-class, first generation undergraduate students, six interviews with working-class, first generation participants' 'non-educationally mobile' working-class family, friends or romantic partners. I also conducted thirteen photo elicitation, five walking and three driving tour interviews. In terms of observations, I attended seven open days, five widening participation events and one fresher's fair. I also socialised with working-class first-generation student participants on campus. This ethnographic tool box is discussed in greater detail below.

Accessing the Field, Accessing the Participants

My decision to embark on a sociological ethnography of working-class first-generation undergraduate students at university was matched with a strong desire to specifically research the university experience of working-class first-generation students at Oxford and Cambridge – given their stark underrepresentation. Whilst working-class students represent 32% of total students in higher education nationally, just 10% of Oxbridge entrants are from working-class families (Boliver 2017). Thus, Cambridge University was identified and initially considered in conversation with a contact at the university. However, as I began to make contact with academic Heads of Department, and those working within the student union, student recruitment and widening participation, I soon experienced ambivalence towards my initial field site. I was disillusioned with the dualistic language that pervaded (and pervades) discourses pertaining to working-class students in higher education. I found binary distinctions between pre- and post-1992 universities, the labelling

of working-class Oxbridge students (whose presence is minimal) as ‘gifted’, and all those that fell outside of said institutions as simply making up the rest, to be intellectually dissatisfying.

Working-class students at elite Russell Group universities I argue, fall outside of this apparent dualism. Working-class students at elite Russell Group universities attend institutions that are, as the Russell Group themselves assert, the “jewels in the crown” of British higher education (Russell Group 2012; Boliver 2015). Furthermore, access to Russell Group universities is restricted to those who possess the highest UCAS tariff and the alumni of Russell Group universities yield significantly higher earnings compared to the alumni of less prestigious institutions (Britton et al., 2016). However, this was a truth that rarely captured the lay, political, media and scholarly commentary to the same extent as the Oxbridge debate. I adopted Skeggs (2015: 45) advice to follow one’s sociological passions, to trust instincts, keep integrity and to not feel pressured into adopting the fashionable sociology of the time and embarked on an ethnography of working-class first-generation students at an elite Russell Group university.

The Field Site

The study took place at Stellar University, a public research university in England. Stellar University is a member of the Russell Group (further discussed below) it is known as an ‘old’ and ‘established’ university in that it was founded prior to the Robbins expansion of higher education in the 1960s and 1970s. The institutional discourse of Stellar University reflects the wider landscape of higher education, namely the marketization, massification and globalisation of higher education. Stellar University espouses a discourse that positions it as a leading

university in the global landscape of higher education whilst also committed to improving access to disadvantaged students through its various widening participation programs that are required as part of its Access Agreement. Since the tripling of tuitions fees in 2012 Stellar University charges the maximum fee that they are permitted to charge for UK/EU undergraduate students. It's undergraduate course offerings are comprehensive ranging from Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences to the Natural Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

With regard to the demographic profile of students at Stellar University at the time of fieldwork, data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA 2015) demonstrates that, Stellar University is in the lowest quintile for state school attendance in both 2014-15 and 2015-16, in the lowest quintile for NSSEC 4-7 for 2014-15, and in the second lowest quintile for students from low participation neighbourhoods for both 2014-15 and 2015-16. There was no data from HESA in relation to the percentage of students from low participation neighbourhoods. It should be noted that quintiles have been drawn upon rather than more precise figures in order to preserve Stellar University anonymity.

Stellar University is a sociologically interesting site on which to conduct an ethnography of working-class students at an elite university owing to the fact that students from private schools and higher socio-economic backgrounds are overrepresented at Stellar University when compared to the population as a whole and indeed when compared to the demographic makeup of universities per se. With regards to the city in which Stellar University resides in, just as most cities it comprises of mixed housing and accommodation options pervade the city landscape, the city and its wider perimeter comprise of groups of social housing, terrace houses, apartment blocks, detached and semi detached homes.

What is Elite about Stellar University?

Stellar University, within this thesis is regarded as being an elite university for a number of reasons. Firstly, the positioning of Stellar University as an elite university within this thesis reflects its dominant construction as being an ‘old’ university, as being a high status university and as being one of the best universities within the UK and wider world. With regards to UK universities “historical designations of Old and New have been applied to different sets of institutions at different times, these terms have always been tacitly synonymous with high and low status institutions, with good and not-so-good universities” (Boliver 2015: 611). Moreover, Stellar University, just as most ‘old’ universities dominate the higher echelons of various university rankings (i.e. The Guardian University Guide; The Complete University Guide). However, it should be noted that such measures and metrics and indeed their validity are continuously questioned (Stacka 2013; David 2016). Even the Higher Education Statistics Agency who provide much of the data for national rankings has warned of the misused of statistics in isolation (HESA 1996 cited in Boliver 2015). Therefore, whilst this in itself is not an objective marker of ‘eliteness’ a universities league table positioning nonetheless yields much currency within the public imagination. Within the UK for example, the mass media’s attention to such league tables has framed policy debates (Stacka 2013) and “league table success is increasingly seen as ‘the’ measure of quality” (David 2016: 170).

In seeking to elucidate further as to why Stellar University, within this thesis is conceptualised as an elite university I wish to draw upon the recent work of Boliver. Specifically, when she writes that “the status differentiation of UK universities is undoubtedly complex and multifaceted” (Boliver 2015: 612) and argues that that distinctions are drawn in relation to five dimensions:

- Research activity
- Teaching quality
- Economic resources
- Academic selectivity
- Socio-economic student mix

Stellar University within this thesis is positioned as an elite university in that it is a relatively wealthy university with an abundance of economic resources when compared to its counterparts; “as a general rule, the wealth of universities is positively correlated with their age” (Boliver 2015: 613). Secondly, as previously noted, Stellar University is an academically selective university, with the average required A-levels grades equivalent to AAB (or 136 tariff points) compared to CDD (or 80 tariff points). Research has illustrated the way in which the academic selectivity in its admission is a marker of status differentiation (Croxford & Raffe, 2014; Raffe & Croxford 2013). Thirdly, Stellar University, within this thesis is positioned as an elite university due to its socio-economic mix. Despite not being listed in university league tables, ranking systems or in university mission statements “but which undoubtedly contributes to different estimations of university prestige, is the socio-economic mix of the students attending different universities” (Boliver 2015: 614). As discussed within chapter one, there exists a body of research highlighting the way in which students from higher socio-economic backgrounds and private schools are over-represented at ‘top’ universities such as Oxford, Cambridge and the Russell Group whereas students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are overrepresented in lower ‘new’ post 1992 universities. Finally, Stellar

University is conceptualised within this thesis as being an elite university owing to its membership to the Russell Group of which “represents 24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector” (Russell Group 2019). Although the Russell Group are a self-selecting interest group they have nonetheless achieved success in their attempts to position and promote themselves as comprising of the UK’s most elite universities.

Accessing Stellar University

My sampling approach was purposive, given that my thesis was focused on the university experiences of working-class first-generation university students at one elite Russell Group university. I approached the Head of Widening Participation (HOWP) at Stellar University through an initial email which introduced myself and my proposed research. It was at this point that the HOWP connected me to the Widening Participation Manager and a meeting was arranged to discuss my proposed research in greater detail. From the very outset of the meeting it was apparent that the Widening Participation Department at Stellar University were supportive of my proposed doctoral research. This included the department offering their services to support the recruitment of participants and data collection. For example, the department offered to circulate an email call for participants to their database of students that had entered the university through the various widening participation schemes and provide a meeting room to conduct interviews with students. Nonetheless I did not take up these offers. Sampling students through the Stellar Universities database - all those students who had been enrolled on widening participation programs – would have biased the sample in a way that was not representative

of the wider working-class, first-generation student population. In addition, I felt that conducting interviews in the Widening Participation Department did not fit with my methodological approach. I politely explained these reasons to my contact and concluded that I would seek to recruit first-generation, working-class students from the broad student population. In addition, the Widening Participation Manager also invited me to various outreach events that the Widening Participation Department delivered over the duration of my research.

However, although the HOWP granted me permission to conduct the research I also sought permission from Heads of Departments and/or Schools. Where possible I approached Heads of Departments and/or Schools in person, introduced myself, the research and asked if I could circulate a call for participants to all undergraduate students through their departmental email list. At this initial stage of my research, during preliminary meetings with Heads of Departments that the value of the Widening Participation Department supporting my research came to the forefront. Coupled with my identity as an Economic and Social Research Council funded researcher. To quote one Head of Department:

Oh, you're ESRC funded and you're with the Widening Participation Department. Of course you can. We wouldn't just let anyone have access to our students you see... (Fieldwork Diary April 2015)

My status as an ESRC researcher served to legitimise my research agenda status within the academic community (although I, myself do not subscribe to such markers of professional success). I learned that this 'legitimacy' could be drawn

upon to facilitate access to the various research sites that constituted the university campus. I was unable to meet face to face with many of the Heads of Departments after initial contact through email, again introducing myself, my research and highlighting that I had the support of the Widening Participation Department and was ESRC funded. I included a statement of support from the Head of the Widening Participation Department and a copy of the Ethical Approval letter from the University of Warwick. Within my email conversation I asked permission to circulate a call for participants. The response was divided, with some Heads of Departments and/or Schools agreeing to circulate without much quibble or query, whereas others objected citing concerns regarding the bombardment of students' inboxes. To quote one Head of Department:

Students are inundated with emails from both the academic school, the careers department, the students' union, the careers and employability centre in addition to the students' union, students' societies and prospective graduate employers. We couldn't possibly sanction the circulation of your call and further bombard them (Research Diary April 2015).

Though this line of objection is reasonable from the students' perspectives, I felt slightly suspicious and couldn't help but feel that declines to circulate my call for participants were rooted in a fear that the project was focused upon the academic integration and support of working-class, first-generation students. In total, thirteen Heads of Departments and/or Schools replied to inform me that they had forwarded the email on, two Heads of Departments declined and I received no reply from nineteen Heads of Departments and Schools.

In addition to participant calls circulated through academic departments, I disseminated posters throughout the university campus in both academic and social spaces. I attached posters to walls, study rooms, notice boards in departments, throughout the library, the students' union and to the back of toilets, to name just a few examples. Following the advice of a first-generation working-class student that I had taught at Warwick the various calls for first-generation working-class student participants stated that I was "also a first-generation working-class student". By clarifying that the research was conducted by a researcher with a shared background to prospective participants I hoped to encourage individuals to take part. An inclination well-matched by the research methods literature (De Tona 2006) and my own fieldwork experience. As one participant put it: *"it helped knowing that the person I'd be talking to would have come from a similar place"*. Despite initial feelings of pessimism during my early experience of participant recruitment – owing to the plethora of academic calls for participants that filled the noticeboards across campus – participants were, from the outset, exceptionally supportive of the research and remained the same throughout.

Accessing Participants' 'Non-Educationally Mobile' Friends, Family and Romantic Partners and Home Locales

A core focus of my study sought to explore the effect of elite university attendance upon student participants' relationships with 'non-educationally mobile' home communities, friends, family and romantic partners. Incorporating students' families and social networks enabled me to explore from a range of perspectives whether attendance at an elite university impacted upon ties and relationships with participants' non-educationally mobile friends, family and

romantic partners, thereby enabling me to probe into the disconnect between a student's home and academic community. Aware of the emotion and pain that often characterises working-class academic success, I was mindful to convey to participants my interest in exploring the possibility of interviewing friends and family members about their experience of elite university attendance in a way where they felt that they were able to decline. To do so, I refrained from asking participants directly if they wanted to partake in this aspect of the research. Instead, I made participants aware that I was exploring the possibility of interviewing family and/or partners and friends through the initial participant information sheet, and through a subsequent information sheet. I stressed that partaking in this aspect of the research was the decision of participants, and if they were interested to let me know.

Interviews with participants' 'non-educationally mobile' friends, family and romantic partners took place at different stages of fieldwork at a time and location most convenient to the participants. I was often invited to meet with family members and romantic partners within the family home consequently extending my ethnography into the home. Student participants were offered the option of being present at the interview, and interviews with family members and friends were conducted on their recommendation on an individual or group basis. In total I conducted six separate interviews with participants' 'non-educationally mobile' friends, family members and romantic partners.

A further focus of my study sought to explore participants' experiences of being a working-class student at the elite sphere of the university and within their working-class locale. I adopted a visual approach to 'data collection' by

conducting thirteen of photo elicitation interviews, five walking and three driving tours. The latter two methods recognise that “vision does not dominate the way we experience our environments” (Pink 2009: 12). Participants’ home locales were explored in two ways, through participant-led photo elicitation and walking and driving interviews. Firstly, I invited all participants to partake in the photo elicitation component of the study whereby they were invited to take a series of photographs that captured their experience of being a working-class first-generation student. Secondly, participants were given the opportunity (where logistically possible) to partake in a walking and driving interviews. Here, I explained to participants that I was interested in exploring the ways in which they experienced being a working-class, first-generation student both at home and at university. This method provided further access to participant’s locales. In total, I undertook a total of thirteen photo elicitation interviews and five walking and three driving interviews, a necessary small number of participants but a qualitatively rich one. I discuss the methodology and ethics of conducting photo elicitation interviews and walking tours later in this chapter.

Who is Defined as Being Working-Class?: Issues of Operationalization

Central to this study was the concept of class, or, more specifically, the concept of working-class. The study aimed to explore the experience s of working-class, first-generation students at an elite university. Identifying working-class students presented operational and theoretical issues. Just as Bathmaker et al. (2013) note in their comparative study of working and middle class student at an elite, research intensive and a new, teaching focused university in the West of England note “the fact that students could be seen as partially removed from any class nexus in a moratorium between their class of origin and their class of

destination (Brake 1980)” (Bathmaker et al., 2013: 278). To overcome this, calls for participants specified that the study was seeking those who identify as coming from a working-class background *or who* attended a state school *or* who received free school meals. This was in recognition that dominant political and lay discourses position being working-class as something by which one should escape *and* in recognition that in austerity Britain is marked by heightened class antagonism fueled by neoliberal inequalities and the subsequent “powerful political myth” (Tyler 2013: 1) of the underclass in addition to the absence of social class within popular discourse and so asking lay individuals to identify their class positioning is not always a fruitful endeavor.

Furthermore, so as to identify class background participants were invited to fill out a short questionnaire that collated information pertaining to their parent’s occupations, parents highest level of education, estimated household income, whether participants were in receipt of a maintenance grant or not and so forth. Participants were also asked if they had any siblings and if they were in higher education or not. From this, it was possible to identify those participants that appeared to come from a working-class background, where I was unsure whether a participant *was* from a working-class background they were invited to interview where it soon became apparent as to whether they were from a working-class background in the Bourdieusian sense. It was not uncommon for participants to leave out missing data, I clearly specified that prospective participants were not required to fill out all of the information I had asked, owing to the sensitive nature of some of the information that I was seeking. For example, I asked question pertaining to household income, whether the prospective participants had been raised on social security, their parental occupation and education level, and how they were financing their degree with

regards to student's loans and grants. As a consequence, some of the data of prospective participants was sometimes partial and, in total, four participants that I had identified from the initial questionnaire who had put themselves forward for interview were from middle-class backgrounds and this became apparent throughout the interview. Thus their transcripts are excluded from the analysis of this thesis. The table below details below participant's race, gender and which fraction of the working-class they belong to based upon the information yielded through either the preliminary questionnaire, or throughout field note.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Name	Race	Gender	Fraction of the Working-Class
Amy	White	Female	Social security
Aron	White	Male	Home owners
Ben	White	Male	Social security
Callum	White	Male	Home owners
Cassie	White	Female	Home owning
Daisha	Black British	Female	Social housing
Daniel	White	Male	NA
Dean	Black British	Male	Home owner
Duncan	BME	Male	Social housing
Faith	Black British	Female	Raised on social security
Jack	White	Male	Social security
Jamie	White	Male	NA
Jane	White	Female	Home owner

Jasmin	British Asian	Female	Home owner
Jessica	White	Female	Home owner
Jodie	White	Female	Home owner
Joe	White	Male	Council estate
Katie	White	Female	Council house
Lewis	White	Male	Social security
Lucy	White	Female	Home owner
Luke	White	Male	Social security
Priya	British Asian	Female	Home owner
Rebecca	White	Female	NA
Robert	White	Male	Social security
Scarlett	White	Female	Social security
Sophie	White	Female	Home owner
Steve	White	Male	Social security

My Ethnography Toolkit

There exists no ‘recipe book’ that teaches ethnographers how to conduct ethnographic research. As O’Reily (2011: 11) argues, “because ethnography is a practice, it is not possible to predetermine what should be done and how”. More than a set of axioms to be followed there are no prescribed sets of procedures and techniques, and so one ethnographer's toolkit will differ from the next. As Delamont notes, “ethnographers of educational settings[...] rarely rely on observations alone” (2016: 92) thus a number of research methods make up my

toolkit: interviews, observations, documentary/textual analysis, photo elicitation interviews, walking and driving interview and thematic data analysis.

On Talk and Interviews

Ethnography involves a great deal of listening (Back 2007; Forsey 2010) and a salient feature of ethnography is the way in which much of the data comes in the form of talk (Delamont 2016). Talk has been solicited within my ethnography through several ways. For example, throughout my fieldwork I solicited talk from participants, in official interviews with single participants and small groups; from formal meetings with various university personnel; through ad hoc conversations of various lengths and seriousness with both the participants of my study and social actors within the university. In addition, talk was solicited as a result of participant observation within the research setting, I listened to public speeches by senior university personnel, to prospective parents and students at university open and applicant visitor days, and closed speeches and informal talk at various outreach and widening participation events. I often overheard conversations among students as I walked around the university residential area, shopped in the local supermarkets, shared public transport frequented by students, studied in the library and socialized in the various on campus social spaces. I was also privy to an array of ‘corridor talk’ between students, professional staff and academics.

A range of empirical material was produced through interviews. I see interviews not as a research tool to be used ‘hygienically’ or as an instrument drawn upon to facilitate the collection of data, nor as a set of rules, or as a practice that encompasses the socialization of ‘correct’ interview behavior so as to ensure

detachment and objectivity. Instead, I concur with Oakley (1981) when she argues that social scientists are best placed to explore the lives of others when research relationships are non-hierarchical and where the researcher is willing, as Letherby writes “to invest their own personal indemnity in the research relationship, answering questions and sharing knowledge” (2003: 83). Akin to Oakley (1981) I regard interviews as a mutual exchange, one characterised by reciprocity and intimacy whereby the researcher is open, honest and gives something of his or herself by revealing through talk or otherwise something about his or her life. The hierarchy between the researcher and respondent is broken down so as not to ‘objectify’ or place the respondent in a passive position; instead active participation is invited and encouraged whereby respondents are given control over the interview process. My method of interviewing was participatory, aiming to produce non-hierarchical and non-manipulative research relationships (Reinharz 1983). From the outset I wanted to allow participants to ‘speak for themselves’ thus opening up space for classed, raced and gendered based stereotypes, oppression and exploitation to be challenged (Stanley 1990; Reinharz 1992; Maynard and Purvis 1994; Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1996). However, it should be noted that allowing participants to ‘speak for themselves’ did not always open up space to disrupt gendered, raced and classed stereotypes and that participant’s sense of self, ideas and ways on speaking are not free from, external to or unbiased by stereotypes or prevailing popular discourses of the day. For example, it was not uncommon for Luke to refer to his upbringing on social security as “*sponging*” thus evoking the dominant discourse of the time that equated welfare recipients as being work-shy and morally lax.

However, participatory in-depth interviews can nonetheless encompass exploitative elements. As Kelly et al. (1994) argues, a woman may not wish to share her experience(s) with another women regardless of whether doing so would be of benefit to the respondent or not. Finch (1984) argues that researchers that are friendly in their character may encourage vulnerable people to reveal personal aspects of their lives during an interview, and so interviewees need to understand the ways in which they are best able to protect themselves at times from interviewers who ask too many questions. Cotterill (1992) reminds us that whilst power is likely to shift within the interview between respondent and researcher one must always be mindful that it is the researcher who walks away with control of the data, and who will benefit from the interview in various ways that the respondent will not. Thus, in feminist research ‘sisterhood’ is too simplistic a lens to view the production of data through (Ramazanoglu 1989; Ribbens 1989; Cotterill 1992; Marshall 1994; Millen 1997). And so, throughout my research, especially so within my one-to-one initial interviews, I adopted a more “sophisticated consideration of the dynamics of power in the research relationship” (Leatherby 2003: 85) an issue discussed within this chapter and weaved throughout this entire thesis.

I agree with Pereira’s rejection of the argument “that interviews are too subjective, misleading, disingenuous, staged and thus unreliable” (Monahan and Fisher 2010 cited in Pereira 2013: 194). Reflecting upon Pereira’s discursive ethnography of the epistemic status of gender studies she argues that whilst interviews are sites of “negotiation” and of “participants’ position vis-à-vis me as a colleague, former students, or fellow feminist. This does not mean that interviews are too subjective, misleading, disingenuous, staged and thus

unreliable (Monahan and Fisher, 2010; Petersen 2003)” (2017: 12). While I acknowledge the argument(s) that interviews are social constructions they are nonetheless a fruitful method to explore the experiences of working-class first-generation students at an elite university. Interviewing has been defined as a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Taylor and Bogdan, 1984; Patton, 2002; Warren, 2002) and it is exactly in this way that I approached my own interviews. In-depth open-ended interviews allow for a “rich, deep and textured picture [...] locally produced in and through the ‘simple’ method of producing topic-initiating and follow-up questions” (Rapley 2001: 315). Within the initial one-to-one interview with participants my aim was to draw out a personal history of participants’ educational experiences. Interview questions were devised to elicit, in chronological order, a participant’s trajectory through primary, secondary and further education, including their experiences of higher education and their perceptions of social mobility through formal education (see appendix six).

Despite being led by a chronologically ordered semi-structured list of interview questions the topics of discussion and the subsequent sentiments expressed were not always discussed chronologically. Occasionally, participants would ask “*Am I going off topic?*” or “*Tell me if this isn’t useful information*”. In these instances, I would explain that I was interested in their experience and what they considered to be important and there was no such thing as going off topic. I tried to state clearly that everything they were telling me was insightful, interesting and valuable, that there was no one ‘correct’ answer that I was looking for, and that I was grateful for all that they shared. I was mindful to give participants as much control over the interview as possible to deconstruct the researcher-respondent

hierarchy. To do so, I allowed participants to guide the discussion and introduce novel topics in so much as was possible acknowledging that, as a social science researcher, power remain with me. As a consequence, interviews produced insights and drew attention to topics that I had not considered asking, participants shared information with me “that might not have been directly solicited” (Hoffman 2007: 343).

Whilst I was concerned with a participant’s subjective and affective experiences of being a first-generation working-class student throughout my interviews, I was mindful to explore participant’s concrete experiences before probing their emotional responses. Just like Reay (1995) in her study of mothers’ involvement in primary schooling and the influence of social class, many of my questions were of the ‘grand tour’ variant (Spadley 1979 cited in Reay 1995); meaning that, in response to participants’ words I often asked participants to “tell me more” and “to tell me about a time when [...]”. I would often ask participants about different aspects of their experience through probes, such as “What was this like for you?” and “How did you feel?”. I explored participants’ recollection of events before proceeding to the ways in which their experiences made each participant feel. During the initial stages of my research and throughout the one-to-one interviews I often found myself caught between the ethics of feminist research that advocates for the sharing of experiences whilst being mindful that I did not wish to influence participants’ responses in anyway, nor engage in interview dialogue that centralized my own experience over that of my participants. In short, whilst the inception of this thesis is the result of my own educational trajectory and the attempt to make sense of that experience, I was

mindful that the focus of this thesis was upon the experiences of my participants and not that of my own.

Whilst I recognize that the sharing of experiences, alike or otherwise, is viewed positively as a way of fostering rapport and communicating empathy (Oakley 1981; Finch 1984; Hanmer and Saunders 1984 cited in Reay 1995) I decided to share my own experiences a) only when explicitly asked by participants, or b) where the subject of discussion was sensitive or was heavily stigmatized. For example, participants often asked me *“Was it like that for you?”* or *“Did you feel the same?”* and so I answered honestly. As Oakley recently argued, reflecting on her own practice of interviewing women some thirty-seven years ago, “refusing to answer was exploitative of interviewees and counterproductive in terms of gaining full and honest account” (2016: 197). Similarly, when participants alluded to the fact that they had been brought on up benefits, were the recipient of free school meals or had experienced classism – to name just three examples – I informed them that this had also been a part of my experience. I did so to convey my familial embeddedness (Geiger 1986), to stress that my listening ear was one of a shared experience and not of judgment, and more importantly to demonstrate that I was listening from a place of empathy and understanding. In some instances, this was an ideal that was achieved, as one participant told me, *“It’s easier to talk about being on benefits and that with you. I don’t tell my friends, they wouldn’t understand. They just go off what they see on the TV and no real experiences”*. It was though instances such as these that my emotional involvement in the interviews was at its most heightened. Finch (1984) argues that friendly researchers encourage, albeit not always intentionally, vulnerable people to share the most intimate aspects of their lives,

and that for this reason “respondents ideally need to know how to protect themselves from interviewers” (Letherby 2003: 85). Throughout my fieldwork, I was attentive to the interactional micropolitics of fieldwork, especially in relation to encouraging participants to take part and ‘open up’. As Morley argues in *Interrogating Patriarchy: The Challenges of Feminist Research*, reflecting upon her own experience of partaking in feminist research:

I have been interviewed by several self-proclaimed feminist researchers who have acted quite abusively in research situations, and have shown an alarming ignorance of the micropolitics of power in interpersonal transactions, by, for example, showing disrespect for boundaries I had set, and constantly pushing me for more information, more of my time. I have been asked crass closed questions and asked to commit to bipolarities not of my making. I have had confidential information referred to in social situations. I have had tape recorders set up without my permission, and no reassurances or information about how the tapes would be used. I have been pushed to reveal painful memories, with no consideration for the emotional consequences. In other words, I, as a feminist researcher, alert to power relations, have been left feeling dominated and angry. Without wishing to sound like superwoman, I have wondered if I allowed this to happen to me, what happens to even more vulnerable members of the community? (Morley 1996: 130).

Observations

On campus, observations were conducted in public and semi-public places such as university open and applicant visitor days, speeches and informal talks at various

outreach, widening participation events, campus tours, fresher's fairs, the university library and other study spaces, as well as campus eateries and food outlets, the students' union bar, and the students' union nightclubs. Off campus, observations extended into the homes of a small number of participants, their families, the university residential area and its commercial outlets, shops restaurant and bars. On campus, I focused upon sites and spaces of student socialization (fresher's fairs, the university library, on campus eateries food outlets and the student's union bar) rather than academic spaces (undergraduate lecture theatres, seminar rooms). This was intentional, as I decided against conducting observations of learning spaces. Whilst, I knew from my time as an undergraduate student and through interviews with my participants that lectures and seminars were often sites where classism plays out through the teaching of class issues in often homogenized, stereotyped, pathologized ways, or through derogatory comments shared in seminar discussions, I also knew that such instances were difficult to predict. Therefore, similar to Pereira (2011), I concluded that it was an impractical and unattainable goal to attempt to disperse myself across participants' courses in the 'hope' that I would witness such instances. Additionally, as Pereira (2011) notes, gaining access to such sites in order to explore classism on campus would have involved some level deception. I would have had to sensor research descriptions on those I would have been observing and subsequently record classes covertly, which I did not wish to do. Instead, during interviews I invited participants to share with me any instances of experiences encountered within the previously mentioned settings above. Specifically, I asked student participants, *"Has there ever been an incident here on campus where you felt your class position caused you to be left out, put down, dismissed, or discriminated against?"*.

In totality, participant observation was conducted at all events that I had access to— as identified by myself or suggested by participants and widening participation personnel(s) of relevance (and sometimes not) to the overall focus of the research. I had permission from the HOWP to attend various widening participation events. In addition, mirroring the practice of Pereira (2011), I also sought permission (written or verbal) from individuals delivering event(s). In these instances, my presence and purpose of the research was announced to those at the start of events, and I encouraged individuals to let me know face to face or through email if they did not want me to include their interactions within my research – nobody requested this. Beyond this point, and in relation to all other observations that were conducted in public and semi-public places I sought to make my identity as a social researcher and the purpose of my research known which involved requesting informed consent verbally or in writing where appropriate. However, when conducting participant observations with large numbers of the university population it was not always possible to make my presence and research known. My appearance as a young female student enabled me to move within my field site as if I were a student of the university raising no alarm bells with those around me as far as I am aware. I danced in the students' union and read books in the library, and had lunch in various campus eateries without qualm or quibble from those around me. In light of this, I borrowed from the practice of Pereira (2011: 13) by focusing my analysis on “claims made in public presentations or situations where participants knew I was doing fieldwork, and using other material mostly to assist me in developing a sense of context, and only very rarely as data”, and I would add only when such data is absolutely vital to conveying and explaining the research findings. When

asked, I was truthful about my biography explaining that I was a PhD student conducting research on working-class students' experiences of being at an elite university as a working-class student myself.

Documentary Analysis

I also collected relevant university artefacts, such as the undergraduate prospectus and student support documentation distributed by student support services, the widening participation department and academic schools and departments, during widening participation events and campus open days. These included documents such as that gave prospective and current students guidance to university life, tips on how to manage their finances and information on settling into university life per se to name just three examples. These documents were given to me by participants, by the widening participation department or obtained through public university events or downloaded from the university website. I was especially interested in collecting documents that communicated the student experience and constructed the 'elite higher education student'. In addition, I also analysed the website of the University of Stellar in recognition that this comprises part of the universities assemblage and regime of enunciation (Pettinger et al., 2016). All of these texts contributed to my analysis pertaining to the politics of belonging and how working-class students experience the elite Stellar University (Chapter 3). I did not conduct a content and/or discourse analysis of these texts owing to the fact that there is an already illuminating body of research that explores constructions of 'the student' and 'the university' through such material (Read et al., 2003; Burke 2012; Hinton-Smith, 2012) and this was not the focus of my research.

Photo Elicitation

A camera has been an almost mandatory element of the ‘tool kit’ for research for several generations of ethnographers (Pink 2007:65)

Within my thesis I drew upon photography as an elicitation and data stimulus method through conducting photo-elicitation interviews. Within my research, photo elicitation was drawn upon as a tool of ‘data’ collection when seeking to explore participants’ experiences of being a first-generation, working-class student at an elite university. Concerned with the emotional politics of social class and the subjective experiences of social mobility through formal education, it was photo elicitations that established the “ability to prod latent memory, to stimulate and release emotional statements about the informant’s life” (Collier: 858) and reach “deeper centers of reaction, triggering spontaneous revelations of a highly-charged emotional nature” (Collier: 858) that drove the selection of photo elicitation.

It is well recognized that photo elicitation interviews prompts talk that is more emotional, affective and ineffable (Bagnoli 2009) and I found this to be the case within my research. In addition, a further motivating factor leading to the implementation of photo elicitation was driven by the way in which “the photographic record can supply detail that could otherwise be obtained only by lengthy first-hand experience” (Collier 1967: 858). A core concern of this research was to explore the way in which a participant’s status as a working-class, first-generation student at an elite university played out within the working-class field (participants’ home locales). Participants inhabited and

moved between their home environments and communities and that of the elite university over the duration of their undergraduate education. The experience was a nonlinear one, with temporal variations between participants, with some participants frequenting ‘home’ more often than others, coupled with the intimacy of returning home alongside the geographical spread of participants it was not practical to access such experiences through the method of participant observation.

Capturing the Ordinary

Given that we are often so familiar with the space and place that we inhabit, reflecting back upon our familiar locations may often be “marked ... only by disasters and breath-taking circumstances” (Collier 1957: 858). As Collier argues, “environmental circumstances may have left the informant so starved for verbal expression” (1957: 858). Similarly, participant driven photo elicitation can facilitate access to researches ‘unknown, unknowns’ (Allen 2012); those instances and things that we don’t know we don’t know (Noyes, 2008: 132).

Photographs are abstractions and so, no matter the familiarity of the situation or object portrayed within the photograph, it is nonetheless a “restatement of reality; it presents life around us in new, objective, and arresting dimensions, and can stimulate the informant to discuss the world about him (sic) as if observing it for the first time” (Collier 1957: 859). It is in this way that the method of photo elicitation encourages participants to “look *out* at everyday life ... [creating] a new arrangement of reality, an abstraction of the part from the whole” (Collier

1957: 859). Interrogating the methodological possibilities of photo elicitation interviews to capture the everyday lives of those in their mid to later life Pilcher et al. (2016) found that photo-elicitation interviewing provided a tool whereby the meanings of everyday life could be explored in a way that made visible the rhythms and patterns that are foundational to one's routinised and habitus everyday life. Specifically, the authors note photo elicitation provides "a means of capturing the 'ordinariness' of daily living; and the day-to-day practical activities and personal meanings embedded within personal" (Pilcher et al 2016: 678).

Given that social class operates and permeates the minutiae of everyday interactions, processes and practices, photo elicitation captures the 'ordinariness' of everyday life but also turn this 'ordinariness' on its head enabling participants to make the familiar strange (Manny 2010). Photo elicitation provides the tool through which participants are able to reflexively rethink their daily lives differently. This opens up the way in which students see their own social worlds, thereby casting light upon otherwise unseen and unnoticed instances of their daily lives and thus enabling participants to communicate dimensions of their lives that would otherwise remain unconscious. As Harper argues "photographs can jolt subjects into a new awareness of their social existence. As someone considers this new framing of taken-for-granted experiences they are able to deconstruct their own phenomenological assumptions" (Harper 2002: 21). Thus, photo-elicitation interviews enabled the working-class student participant "to do and think things they had forgotten, or to see things they had always known in a new way" (Banks 2001: 95).

Making The Familiar Strange

A further motivating factor that led me to adopt the method of photo elicitation was rooted in its ability to make the familiar strange for those who are researching a topic of which they are already, in part, an ‘insider’ to by making the context more perceptible through ‘defamiliarization’ (Gurevitch 1998). The concept of defamiliarization was introduced by Shklovsky who argues that perceptions of everyday familiar situations can become stagnant and out-dated over time and that art and the visual address such atomisation as it encourages us to slow down and deconstruct our perceptions by ensuring that we linger and notice that which we may otherwise miss (Gurevitch, 1998), thus opening up experience and making the familiar strange. As a researcher with shared biographical traits, I envisaged photo elicitation as a tool by which I was able to make the familiar experience of being a working-class student at an elite university strange for both myself and the participants of my study.

Whilst participant observation was a core component of this study it was not possible to observe all participants at all times across all instances relative to their experience of being a working-class, first-generation student at an elite university, particularly when participants were based in their home communities and locales. Therefore, given that I could not always be physically present in the lives of my participant photo elicitation provided a way in which this was overcome as it enables researchers to “‘see’ what is often ‘unseen’” (Pilcher 2016: 682). Images have the propensity to portray what may otherwise remain hidden thus enabling access to ‘back stage’ instances and routines that are seldom accessed in conventional interviewing. In a similar vein photo elicitation

affords participants the opportunity to “show rather than ‘tell’ aspects of their identity that might have otherwise remained hidden” (Croghan et al., 2008: 345).

Thus, for the aforementioned reasons photo elicitation was envisaged as a fitting method facilitating the sociological exploration of first-generation working-class student’s experience of elite university. Photo elicitation interviews with participant generated photos focus participant’s attention to those taken-for-granted instances in their lives. Asking participants to take photographs of their lives and then discuss those photos encourages them to reflect upon their daily activities and experiences that they would seldom have done otherwise. It is in this way that distance from what one is normally immersed in is created, providing space for participants to identify and thus articulate thoughts and feelings that typically remain implicit (Blinn and Harrist 1991; Holliday 2004; Latham 2003; Liebenberg 2009; Manny 2010).

Empowerment

Given the feminist nature of my research and the desire for the co-creation of research data in so far as was possible, the adoption of photo elicitation was a good fit for a number of reasons pertaining to empowerment. Photo elicitation highlights participants’ voices and perceptions (Collier 1967) thus seeking to give voice to those traditionally devalued or silenced (Banks 2001). However, I argue that the ability of said method to ‘empower’ participants within the research process is dependent upon a number of mediating factors. Within the context of my own study I regarded the questions of ‘who is the person responsible for taking the photographs?’ and ‘who is interpreting them?’ as

fundamental questions in relation to participant empowerment. Three possible answers included: the researcher, the respondent, or both working together in collaboration. For me personally, recognizing that working-class people are seldom positioned as ‘expert’ or in positions of power and control, coupled with the social justice nature of my research and debates pertaining to the question of ‘who speaks for whom’, it was important to me that participants’ *own* voices and experiences of being a first-generation, working-class student was heard through the visual methods. Enabling participants to generate images and inviting them to comment on why they took a photo and what the photo means creates a clear and central role for participants within the research and positions them as the ‘experts’ within the interview (Rose 2016). Inherently, participant generated photo elicitation requires collaboration between participants and the researcher in a way that most other methods do not (Rasmussen and Smidt 2003; Liebenberg 2009; Mannay 2010; Allen 2012) thereby situating participants as co-collaborators in the production of knowledge.

The method of participant led photo elicitation reflects feminist underpinnings where a participant’s subjective experiential standpoints are privileged (Collins 1990; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002). Photo elicitation can be empowering through its ability to allow one to explore their own experiences in a creative and reflexive way (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006). It was my concern to give a platform to and centre the voice of participant’s understandings of their experiences. Visual methodologies often enable participants to re-tell and thus challenge, dominant stereotypes associated with a particular group and / or experience as was the case with Brady and Brown’s (2013) research exploring the identities of young mothers. Similarly, Sensoy (2011) employed the method

of photo essays to explore Canadian middle school students' experiences of racism, classism, and sexism while growing up in an "economically depressed area of the Metro Vancouver region" (Sensoy 2011:345). The study entitled 'Picturing oppression: seventh graders' photo essays on racism, classism, and sexism' found that not only did the method of photo essays communicated to 'the world' what it meant to live with race, class, or gender oppression, but did so in a way that provided participants with the space and platform to foreground their own narratives that countered the mainstream in ways that were both literal and metaphorical.

What I did

I recognise that "the meanings of photographs are arbitrary and subjective: they depend on whose looking [and that] the same photographic image may have a variety of (perhaps conflicting) meanings invested in it at different stages of ethnographic research and representation, as it is viewed by different eyes and audiences in diverse temporal historical, spatial and cultural contexts" (Pink 2001: 67-68). I therefore concluded that participants were going to be the sole interpreters of photographs, that my analysis would only focus upon verbatim recordings of photo elicitation interviews and the subsequent discussions of the photographs and explanations of what the photographs depicted as put forth by participants. Recognizing the subjective gaze and that photographic meanings are produced in relation to an individual's personal experiences and cultural discourses, I acknowledge critiques surrounding the notion that "photographs can be tools which to obtain knowledge" (Collier and Collier 1986: 1999). I move beyond Collier's assumption that "the facts are in the pictures" (Collier and Collier 1986: 106) and instead I adopt Harper's (1998) contention that

photographs are not records of reality but representations of different realities as they are understood thus understanding photo elicitation to be something more than “inserting a photograph into a research interview” (Harper 2002: 12).

Participants were invited to take part in the photo elicitation component of the research. They were asked take photos that documented their experience of being the first in their family to study at university. There were two main stages to the photo elicitation research process. In the first stage, I met with participants to explain about the purpose of the photo elicitation interviews and what would happen if the participant agreed to partake in the photo elicitation component of the study, including time frames, issues of confidentiality and the right to withdraw or refuse participation, photo confidentiality and ethics and the use of data produced (both verbatim interview transcripts and the photographs produced). I provided prospective participants with a hard copy of the issues discussed (Appendix. 1 ‘Photo Elicitation: invitation to partake’). Upon agreeing to partake in the photo elicitation interviews I provided participants with a document entitled ‘Photo Elicitation Guidelines’ (appendix 3b) either in a hard copy in person or electronically through email. Within this document I explained that as a researcher I wanted to get to know how the participant experiences university and what it means to be a first-generation university student at a Russell Group University through a series of photos that you take and share with me. Whilst I did not stipulate to participants what to photograph I asked them to take photographs that document three aspects of their experiences as a first-generation, working class student: 1. Their experience of being the first in their family to study at university; 2. Their experience of moving between university and home. 3; who they are at university and who they are at home; and anything else that they would like share that shows me who they are and what their

university experience means to them. I stressed that the photos could be taken at any time, at any place, of any one and be of anything; that the photos may depict places, objects or people but do not have to; and that the photos can be metaphorical, figurative or abstract. I did not tell participants how many photographs to take.

In the second stage I met with participants (usually in their university home, on campus in eateries' or in private study spaces in the library) to conduct a photo-elicitation interview. Interviews lasted approximately one hour with the shortest interview lasting thirty minutes and the longest an hour and a half and were recorded verbatim on a Dictaphone. Participants were given the right to consent to their images being used for academic research and publications purposes and were also asked to gain consent if there were other peoples present and identifiable in the photograph(s) that they took. Participants were asked to sign a photograph reproduction form so as to ethically negotiate copyright of the photographs. Participants were given the right to specify which photographs they wished to give permission for me to include throughout my future research dissemination (in presentation, academic papers and the alike). The privacy of participants was respected although through an informed consent sheet that listed which photos could and could not be disseminated and in what ways, however, no participant requested that I omit any photo(s) from the project.

Walking and Driving Tours

Spaces and places are constructed, given their material construction, and they are also interpreted, perceived, imagined, understood and felt (Soja 1996). Thus, occupying space is a multisensorial experience (Pink 2015). In order to explore

participants' experiences of transitioning between the elite sphere of the university and their working-class locale *and* to further probe the experience of being a working-class, first-generation student at an elite university, I conducted a number of walking and driving interviews. Pragmatically, participant-led walking and driving tours provided insight into the lives of participants where it would otherwise "be too intrusive to develop long-term encounters" (Pink and Morgan 2012: 358). This was especially the case in relation to a participant's working-class locales as the possibility of long term, sustained field encounters within a participant's home locales was not feasible owing to the geographical spread of participants' home locales in addition to the fact that they resided near Stellar University for most of the year.

Conscious of the fact that that walking and driving tours are not simply a case of "if you conduct a method-in-this-place you will secure this type of knowledge" (Anderson and Jones 2009: 300), I was mindful to the micro politics of the field interactions. Aware that "predetermining routes might be expected to lessen the empowerment felt by interviewees choosing their own route, which may in turn detract from the informality of the encounter" (Evans and Jones 2011: 850), participants were invited to direct the walking and driving tours 'in the field' – all of whom did. Thus, the cultural act of *bimbling* was employed, the act of "wondering aimlessly through a co-ingredient environment, which can be harnessed to prompt theretofore unstated or unrecalled knowledge of the life-world" (Moles 2008: 4.3). Aware that "people and place combine" (Moles 2008: 1.1) the participant led walking and driving tours gave access to "some of the transcendent and reflexive aspects of lived experience" (Kusenbach 2003: 455) of being a first-generation, working-class student at an elite university and

illustrated how particular knowledges are often embodied within, and constituted within specific contexts (Anderson 2004; Harvey and Riley 2005; Riley 2010). Walking and driving tours gave way to a three-way conversation between the place, researcher and participants (Hall et al., 2006), providing space for new themes and existing ones to be further explored.

With regards to the multisensoriality of the walking and driving tours, there were differences between the various driving and walking tours that I conducted. Throughout the driving tours movement was experienced as a visual flow through the windscreen window and the sensation was that of mere background traffic and the subtle sound of the radio that was playing at low volume. Walking tours however ensured that both myself and my participants were exposed to and experienced the stimulations of the multi-sensory surrounding environment (Pink 2015). Driving tours, though fruitful, nonetheless, at times, restricted the exploration of the field site. The subtle sound of the radio, the car's interior tranquility in addition to the car as a site of familiarity for myself fostered an environment that was "highly personal, controlled and relaxing sonic bubble" (Bijsterveld 2010: 189), which was not always conducive to the explorations of students' experiences of being a first-generation working-class student. The seamlessness of the linear movement, the transit of the car without disruption resulted in a somewhat desensitized effect and it was in this way that our "sensory contact with urban materiality [...] was] undoubtedly reduced, replaced by other, more cocooned sensations" (Edensor 2007: 221). As a consequence, the driving tours were seldom more than what felt, to me, like a 'tour' of participants' locales and the data yielded reflected this. In contrast walking interviews exposed both myself and my participants to the environment in a way that was multi-sensory stimulation. The immediacy and kinesthetic rhythm of

the walking tours ensured that a participant's embodied experience was a point of consideration (Middleton 2009).

Data Analysis, Writing Up and the Dissemination of Research

As Hammersley and Atkinson (1997: 205) argue, data analysis “starts to take shape in analytic notes and memorabilia; informally, it is embodied in the ethnographer's ideas and hunches”. It was in this vein that my data analysis coincided in-line with data collection, and was thus an iterative process, of coding, writing, theorising and research that occurred simultaneously. In doing so, my understanding of the data was sharpened. In my research diary from the outset I shaped and summarised data, recorded theorising during coding, and reflected on explicit and implicit decisions that I had made throughout the research process. The diary served as a reservoir of my “analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions and directions for further data collection” (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 110). Seven months into my ethnography I undertook an overseas institutional visit to work with Dr. Wolfgang Lehmann at the University of Western Ontario, Canada. There I undertook preliminary data analysis and spent much time thinking through the initial data. Moving away from my field site, spatially, intellectually and psychologically enabled me to think afresh concerning my data with greater objectivity and clarity. Presenting my preliminary interpretation and theoretical understanding of the findings to Dr. Lehmann and the wider academic community through various colloquiums enabled me to identify, through rapid peer response, the data, themes, perspectives and interpretations that needed further clarifying and sociological interrogation.

I began to transcribe the interviews the day after they were conducted, however this was not always possible as interviews with participants were often conducted on consecutive days due to the temporality of student life and the availability of participants. This was especially the case during the initial stages of the research when I was meeting a large pool of prospective participants in a short period of time. With regards to analysis, prior to coding data in an attempt to achieve immersion and thus theoretical sensitivity I read and re-read the interview transcripts before formal coding and conception formation. I employed manual analysis when seeking to analyse themes that arose from the data. During this period, memo notes were taken of initial impressions and detailed annotations of transcripts in-line with my broad thinking prior to formal coding and conception formation.

The method of thematic analysis was drawn upon and interview transcripts were revised by myself on three occasions throughout thematic analysis. During the first pass open coding was employed to “locate themes and initial codes” (Neuman 2011: 511), preliminary labels and concepts were assigned to ‘chunks’ of data. During the second pass axial coding was employed, initial codes and themes were revised and key concepts of analysis were identified. In other words, “connections between evidence and concepts” (Neuman 2011: 511) were established. Finally, ‘selective coding’ was employed to highlight key themes guided the research analysis, such as “classism and racism on campus” and “the effects of elite university attendance upon relationships with ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends, family and romantic partners”, and cases that illustrated and

elaborated already identified themes were located. Data analysis was not, in totality, directed by my initial research questions. Instead, the following questions guided the systematic mapping of my data: What were the main issues presented? What is being described in the data? How is it understood? What does it mean and why? I wanted to remain open to the discovery of new and emergent themes, and, importantly, I wanted to allow the data to speak for itself, and for this to guide my sociological thinking and analysis. I wanted to listen to what the data was telling me rather than impose strict boundaries around my line of enquiry and analysis. As Back (2007: 5) argues, “this is what sociology is needed for, and, as a consequence, why it is a listener’s art”.

With regards to the preparation of, writing up, and dissemination of fieldwork there were a number of issues at play with regard to my commitment to participants and Stellar University. I have discussed above, in line with each research method, how I approached informed consent and the right to withdraw. Here I wish to discuss the issue of anonymity with regards to the writing up, and dissemination of this study. At the heart of preparing, writing up and disseminating this thesis findings was the issue of confidentiality and anonymity. I wish to echo Loveday when she writes that:

One of the most important ethical considerations of the research has been to protect the anonymity of participants who are anxious not to be recognisable in any way (Loveday 2016: 114)

Participants, were, from the outset, concerned with remaining anonymous as was the elite higher education institution that opened their campus doors to my

ethnographic gaze. As one participant told me, “*Do you know what, one way you can make sure I am not identifiable is by not including the name [of identifiable characteristics] that would give me away easily I reckon*” (Robert). Therefore, in honoring my commitment to both the participants *and* Stellar University there is much “thick description” (Geertz 1973) that has been left out. For example, in my section that elucidates the demographic makeup of Stellar University there is no data that elucidates or paints a picture of Stellar University. For instance I make no reference to its physical features, I was unable to do so without risking its anonymity. Similarly, in chapter three I open with an excerpt from my research diary whilst on a campus tour; however I do not present material that could lead to the identification of Stellar University. Within recent sociological research there exists no clear consensus as to whether one *should* name the university under study. For example, the case study universities that are the basis of Reay et al. (2009, 2011) research exploring the socio-cultural experiences of working-class students in higher education were kept anonymous. Whereas, the two universities that are the case study sites in the seven year longitudinal Paired Peers from the outset, explicitly named (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Similarly, the doctoral work of Burke (2001) and Loveday (2011) explicitly make known the university under study owing to the insider nature of the research, both researchers worked at their respective universities. One might argue that with regards to chapter three ‘*Racism, Classism and the Politics of Belonging: How Working-Class Student’s Experience an Elite University*’ that naming the institution may be in the participant’s best interest given that it is only when such instances are made public thus capturing the public imagination that institution take seriously such issues. However, in setting out my position on this issue I want to share with you the below excerpt from Phipps (2018) who, drawing upon

her research of sexual harassment and violence in and across neoliberal universities writes that:

I am not going to name the institutions I have studied: I suggest that if we are going to encourage universities to act on these issues, we need to avoid this approach. I will argue that institutional reputation plays a major role in how sexual harassment and violence are dealt with, and although I wish to name and interrupt that process, it would not be fair to expose particular institutions while the rest of the sector continues to operate in this way. To ‘name and shame’ specific universities might allow others to pretend they do not have similar problems (and to enjoy the attendant market benefits), when it is now well-established that sexual harassment and violence occur across higher education. (Phipps 2018: 2-3).

With regards to my own study, identifying the institution was not possible as guaranteeing that Stellar University be kept anonymous was a prerequisite of gaining access. Furthermore, naming the institution would arguably compromise the anonymity of participants. In this same vein, so as to ensure the anonymity of participants, no biographical details are given where possible to situate and contextualize the participants’ narrative although these are intentionally vague. Providing more exact, in-depth information would have jeopardised the anonymity of the participants of this study, this is the reason as to why I decided not to include participant biographical sketches of participants within the main body or appendix of this thesis. Whilst biographical sketches of participants would arguably have added a further layer with regards to the context of

participants' biographies and journeys to and through the elite university it is not central in helping to paint an overall picture of the study's findings. Therefore, in depth biographical details of the participants are weaved throughout this thesis and only when contextually necessary, for example, this is most evident within chapter five when I provide in depth case studies of Steve and Luke. With regards to on and off campus observations, claims made publicly are anonymised and the specificities of exactly when I observed on campus open days, partook on campus tours and the alike are vague. As I have discussed above, owing to the difficulty of obtaining informed consents I drew upon such material only when such data was absolutely vital to conveying and explaining the research findings.

Reflexivity and Ethics in Practice

Reflexivity becomes a goal we are working towards rather than something that can be accomplished through research [...] it is one thing to write about reflexivity and yet another to operate reflexivity in practice (Reay 1996: 12)

Within this section I seek to critically reflect upon my experience of conducting an ethnography of working-class students at an elite university as a working-class student at an elite university. In doing so, I grapple with issues pertaining to the research gaze, friendship in ethnographic research, insiderism and discuss the way in which sameness, difference and tacit knowledge played out during fieldwork.

The Research Gaze Turned Around

Throughout my fieldwork I was not the only individual asking questions. Just as Pereira found in her ethnography of Portuguese academia I was also “the object of the gaze and questioning” (Pereira 2011: 27). Therefore, I came under much observation from participants in relation to my own subjective experience of being a first-generation working-class student; my epistemological and ontological positioning; my conceptualization of concepts central to my thesis such as that of social-class; and my method of analysis. Naturally, some of my participants were students of sociology and so spoke the language of sociology and responded to my questions so articulately that in one of my interviews I joked that the participant could write my PhD for me: *“This is great you’re doing all the analysis for me, you wouldn’t like to come to the library with me and write it too?!”* (Fieldwork diary 2016). On one occasion I was asked by a sociology student which theoretical framework I was drawing upon to guide my analysis and interpretation, and in another which epistemological and ontological foundations guided my sociological inquiry. Later on during participant observation, I was asked by another participant (although not a sociologist) *“What themes have emerged?”*, and on many occasions I was asked by participants from different disciplinary fields *“How do you personally conceptualise social class?”* and *“What does the concept of class mean to you?”*. In all instances I responded honestly and asked participants what their thoughts were in reaction to my response, using the opportunity to engage in reciprocal dialogue with participants about the research.

Unlike Pereira I did not attempt to construct myself as “the right kind of researcher in the eyes of a particular (and changing) audience” (2011: 28). My decision not to do so was grounded in the assumption that participants’ questions

were directed not by a concern regarding the production of knowledge nor “tests of scholarly quality” (Pereira 2011: 28), but rather arose as a direct result of participants seeking to make sense of their own experience as opposed to reviewing the theoretical foundations guiding my academic work. Nonetheless, questions regarding my ontological and epistemological foundations, emerging themes, and the conceptualization of social class were marked by a dynamic of power in the research process, one where in relation to the questions asked I was positioned as the ‘expert’, given my status as a student of sociology a discipline that the overwhelming majority of participants were not students of and thus not familiar with the discipline. This was in addition to my status as an ESRC funded doctoral researcher of sociology relative to each participant’s status as an ‘undergraduate student’.

Friendship

Khan (2013) writes of the way in which participants become friends and that friends often divulge things to friends that they would not a researcher, and this was certainly my experience. Oakley (1981, 2016) has written of the way in which within longitudinal research a “transition to friendship” can characterize fieldwork. Mindful of this, as a responsible sociologist and feminist ethnographer I reminded participants, throughout fieldwork, on a number of occasions, that I was conducting research and that what they were sharing with me might be included as data, and that should they wish for it not to be the case to let me know. This was a conversation that I had with participants, before, frequently throughout and after fieldwork.

As McKenzie (2009: 109) found in her ethnography of a council estate, participants were vocal in letting her know what they did and did not to be recorded by telling her, “I hope you write this down” and “don’t use that” and this too was my own experience. When there was material, such as direct quotes or thick descriptions that I felt to be deeply personal and sensitive in nature I double checked with participants as to whether I had their permission their permission to include that data in my analysis and write up. On a number of occasions, participants asked that I did not included this data within my analysis and dissemination and I honored their requests, for example, in chapter five when discussing the effects of elite university attendance upon participant’s romantic relations with their ‘no-educationally mobile’ partners I present only a field note excerpt that was approved by Scarlett and no data yielded through the method of interview as per Scarlett’s request. As I have discussed above, throughout the fieldwork, I approached the issue of access and informed consent as an ongoing process as opposed to a one-off initial event.

Insiderism

I am often asked at academic conferences and events, both explicitly and inexplicitly, whether my field site is my home university of the University of Warwick. So much so that I now address the question before it is even raised. Many find themselves excited and intrigued by the prospect that I may be conducting ‘insider research’. Seduced by its inherent intellectual and methodological messiness the initial thought that I might be conducting insider research evoked much response from the scholarly community. Whether it be due to the Jekyll and Hyde like nature of occupying both the position of researcher and worker; the allure of accessing and subsequently baring witness to instances of both the ivory tower and student experience that few have seldom

been made public; or the politics of casting a critical sociological gaze upon one's own institution. Whilst I did not conduct my research at the University of Warwick this thesis is however, one of situated insiderism. Given the auto/biographical nature of the thesis's inception, coupled with my location as a postgraduate research student at an elite university, a student who comes from a similar historical, social and economic background as my participants, I am not only an insider to elite higher education but also to the lives of my participants. Thus to the very experience that I seek to research: that of working-class academic success. Far from being a hindrance having a basis in working-class life has enabled me to explore my subject in a way that has facilitated access to instances central to my participants' experiences of being a first-generation working-class student that would have otherwise remained undisclosed. Many UK sociologists from working-class backgrounds attest to the methodological value of a shared class background, arguing that along with the associated commonality of shared experience(s) and understandings that it enables the exploration of topics that those from a different class background would struggle to access and explore (Back 1996; Skeggs 1997; Reay 1998; Loveday 2011; McKenzie 2009, 2015). Thus, the position of 'intimate insider' is one of a "particularly privileged intellectual position" (Loveday 2011: 47). Just as those working-class researchers that have come before, me I recognise the methodological hurdles that come as part and parcel of insider research (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Hendry 1992; Laboree 2002) and it is those methodological hurdles that I seek to elucidate throughout what follows.

Situating the Researcher: Sameness, ‘Difficult Differences’ (Reay 1996) and Tacit Knowledge

As I have discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the present study was a development of my BSc Sociology undergraduate dissertation which arose out of an intellectual and personal desire to make sense of my own experience of moving away, metaphorically and literally from my home community and into the space of the university. This intellectual and personal sense making was simultaneously coupled with a political motivation to provide space for and give voice to the telling of a different story – a different educational experience and outcome that is seldom associated with what it means to be working-class in both public, policy and media discourse – that of ‘success’. Whilst my research was born out of the desire to make sense sociologically of my own experience of ‘being working-class’ and journeying through higher education, the research is not about me nor about my experiences educationally or otherwise. Nonetheless, I cannot omit myself from my thesis research in its entirety. As Lofland and Lofland (1995: 13) rightly argue, “it is often said among sociologists that, as sociologists, we ‘make problematic’ in our research matters that are problematic in our lives”. It is in this vein that my social positioning and identity was brought to the field in myriad of ways. Whilst I have never studied or considered studying at Stellar University, nor did I have friends prior to the research who had studied at Stellar University, and so was not affiliated to the university in any way. I am however a first-generation working-class student studying at a Russell Group university. Importantly, I share with the student participants of my study a specific socio-political historical location. We are all, to echo Kimberley Allen (2014), “Blair’s children” and thus, to some degree, have experienced the institutionalisation of the socio-political rhetoric of aspiration and education within school practices and cultures.

Skeggs (1997) writes of the way in which she began her research because she recognized similarities between the women of her study and the position which she formally occupied, although, she did not assume that because of this that she was able to put herself in their place. As Skeggs (1997) writes, it was a place that she had left and her associated higher education experiences caused sufficient differences to render Skeggs ‘dissimilar’ from her subjects. Unlike Skeggs account in *Formations of Class and Gender*, my participation in higher education did not make me ‘dissimilar’ from my subjects. Instead I felt more like my participants as the study progressed. My experience of university as both an undergraduate and a postgraduate doctoral researcher more closely mirrored that of my participants than it did the majority of my university peers outside of fieldwork. Thus, the ground between myself and my participants seldom opened up although there were instances of interesting power relations throughout the research. As participants made their way through university and into a world of graduate work and further study some participants accrued greater economic capital than I, a doctoral researcher on a studentship possessed. This experience stood in stark contrast to Skeggs who in relation to her participants writes:

This acute awareness of difference threw the power differentials between us into relief in a way which had been hidden in the past. Every time I walked away from a visit in the later stages of the research, I experienced a sense of physical and metaphorical escape: *it could have been me* (emphasis added). This generated an enormous burden of guilt which blocked my ability to handle the situation. The privileges which I embodied I experienced as flaunting. I

tried different strategies to ignore or refuse my difference, but it was so obvious that it could not be denied (Skeggs 1997: 16-17).

That is not to say that I did not experience the privileges that had arisen as a direct result of doctoral study as flaunting. I did, and, importantly, I still do every day, in ways that are mundane, ordinary and extraordinary. Whilst there existed little instances of difference between me and my participants I was nonetheless unable to escape feelings of guilt throughout the research process. However, this guilt arose not out of a recognition that “it could have been me” as participants told their narratives but rather the continuous acknowledgement that, as Frances Ryan so poignantly writes, “our success is built off the back of the ones left behind” (Ryan 2016); an uncomfortable truth and one that I have long faced up to. Throughout each and every stage of the research process I was mindful that in writing the stories of those that had ‘succeeded’ in formal education I was also telling the stories of those who had not, however unintentional. In doing so deep-seated feelings of anxiety, guilt and anger but also feelings of ‘luck’ and service just as many academics from working-class backgrounds have written (Mahony and Zmroczek 1997, Reay 1997, Skeggs 1997).

Although much of what I read within my data speaks to my own experiences there is also much that does not. Throughout the sentiments expressed, the stories told, and the instances observed whilst it could be said that *similarities* characterised my research relationships to a greater extent than *difference* there nonetheless existed “difficult differences” (Reay 1996). These are to be found in the instances where I did not identify, agree with or find desirable the sentiments expressed by my participants. Such instances included when participants

explained their relative educational success through a discourse of merit, hard work and talent seldom acknowledging structural (in)equalities; or when a small subset of female participant's spoke of the way in which their university attendance had effected their romantic relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' partners. Or when participants (albeit very few) espoused divisive and discursive repertoires such as the deserving and undeserving poor, the aspirational and non-aspirational working-class, or who expressed uncritical acceptance of 'commonsense' understandings and myths of worklessness, welfare and social protection claimants (Jensen 2014). This also relates to what Bourdieu understands as "doxa"; "that which goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu 1972: 167 cited in Jensen 2014) and what Tyler (2013) argues creates "revolting subjects" and "social abjection" that contemporary neoliberal society thrives off. It is in these ways that my participants were entangled in the power structures that this thesis critiques. Dealing with these differences was difficult throughout the analysis but they nonetheless remain present throughout the analysis. For example, in chapter five *'Sibling Rivalry and Romantic Rifts, the Pains and Possibilities of Elite University attendance and Participants' Perceptions of Social Class and Social Mobility'* I present data that illustrates the strain placed upon family relationships when one sibling 'succeeds' in education where the other does not. Similarly, I also present data that highlights the way in which for a small sub-set of female participant's attendance at Stellar University and thus the subsequent possibility of combining educational success, work and family commitments was not one well support by their 'non educationally-mobile' partners. Both of these experiences do not speak to my own experience of journeying to and through elite higher education. These were undoubtedly difficult differences to discuss, analyse and include within the write up of this thesis for fear of perpetuating

gendered and classed stereotypes. Nonetheless, these were the stories of small sub-set of female participants and so they are stories that feature in this thesis. Reflecting upon such entanglements of power, I wish to cite Reay when reflecting upon her experience of conducting feminist research writes that “there is always a risk of conflating your own experience with the very different experiences of other women from working-class backgrounds” (1996: 453).

The experience of identifying and continuously negotiating similarities and differences between researchers and their participants has featured in much feminist writing (Morley 1996; Reay 1996; Skeggs 1997; Birch 1998; Leatherby 2003; Lumsden 2013). However, for Reay, what’s “more important is how the researcher deals with the differences she finds” (Reay 1996: 444) noting that differences between women are overwhelmingly theorized in ways that stereotype and pathologise (Walkerline and Lucey 1989 cited in Reay 1996). With regards to education, working-class individuals are constructed through stereotypical and pathologised ways, through discourses of deficit and lack (Read et al., 2003; Burke and Jackson 2007; Hollingworth and Williams 2009; Burke 2015; Hinton-Smith 2012; McKay and Devlin 2015).

As an insider I was mindful to make explicit the shared, tacit knowledge that as a result of my working-class background and experience of elite university, participants assumed was shared and thus did not need elucidating. As Reay found, “explicating the taken for granted of women’s lives has been a difficult process because, for a large part, it is a taken for granted I share in” (1995: 76). Whilst there were many instances where I did feel that I had a grounded understanding, I was mindful, echoing Reay (1996), not to steal the worlds out

of participants' mouths and mistake such act being an insider perspective. Thus, so as to mitigate such instances I would often ask participants, "*What exactly do you mean?*" when participants were vague in their response. Of course, there were many instances when participants simply responded with either a blank face, a puzzled look or a polite smile accompanied by the utterance of "*You know what I mean*" ... and of course I did. Whilst such instances illustrated our shared knowledge it more profoundly highlighted participants' *possible* faith in my tacit understanding of their lives and experiences and participants' *possible* belief that I would then go on to accurately represent their lives and experiences. This is further exemplified when, during fieldwork, a participant turned to me, looked me in the eye and said, "*You know, if there's stuff missing from the interview that I haven't said that you need for your project then feel free to just make it up. Like write it up and say that I have said it if you want*" (Anonymous). Whilst I, of course, did not take up the offer it *arguably* demonstrates that participants felt that I would represent their experiences accurately.

Within sociological research, and across the social sciences per se there is the assumption that researchers exploring the familiar can elicit greater understanding as social 'norms', linguistic and cultural barriers do not need to be negotiated, and that participants may be more open and are less likely to obscure certain aspects of their lives (Henry, 2001; Atkinson et al., 2003). However, in this same vein there is also the issue of over-identification and projection onto participants which, as a result, has the propensity to close down the space for difference between my experience and that of my participants (Reay 1996; Skeggs 1997). As Skeggs notes, "tacit and normalizing effects in knowledge operates by taking one group's experiences and assuming these to be paradigmatic of all [...] many theorists do not try to hear or see anything other

than from where they are located” (Skeggs 1997: 4). Thus, throughout the doctoral research process, I have been mindful not to conflate my experience with that of my participants. “*You know what I mean?*” was a rhetorical phrase that I became accustomed to hearing and throughout my fieldwork participants frequently acknowledged and referenced our shared identity and experience through such utterances. However, aware that the position of ‘indigenous observer’ means that prior knowledge can seldom be renounced and thus preconceived understandings can mask the invisibility of unknown I did not wish to assume commonalities. Consequently, throughout much of my fieldwork I found myself seeking clarification and confirmation from participants explaining that I wanted to make sure that our tacit knowledge was indeed shared knowledge. To do so, I often asked participants “What do *you* mean?”; “*How so?*”, or “*Do you have an example?*” and participants were aware that this was motivated by a desire and commitment to foreground the voices of my participants rather than probing, pushing and facilitating the ‘extraction of data’.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have sought to elucidate the “tapestry of methodology” (Gagnon 2016) that made up ethnographic methodological toolkit. In doing so I explained my decision to undertake a feminist ethnography of working-class students at an elite university in the United Kingdom. I then outlined my methodological toolkit in detail: identifying when, how, and with whom my empirical material was produced; paying attention to how my commitment to ethical research and confidentiality – together with the personal, the political, the temporal and, unexcitingly, the practical – shaped the formation of this doctoral research design; time spent in the field and the writing up of the research. In the

latter body of this chapter, I have critically reflected upon my experience of conducting an ethnography of working-class students at an elite university as a working-class student at an elite university. In doing so, I grapple with issues pertaining to the research gaze, friendship in ethnographic research, insiderism and discuss the way in which sameness, difference and tacit knowledge played out during fieldwork whilst, at the same time being mindful that reflexivity is more than something to simply ‘be done’.

Moreover, in drawing this chapter to a conclusion I want to recognize that writing sociologically is both an art and a craft (Balmer Murcott 2017; Bourdieu et al., 1991; Crow 2005) and one that I am very much an apprentice too. Throughout the doctoral write up and indeed, from the very outset of this study I have been committed, politically and intellectually to portraying the nuances and heterogeneity of my participant’s experiences so as to challenge the stereotypical, pathological and homogenous ways in which working-class people/lives have historically been conveyed, especially in relation to education. However, academic, institutional and disciplinary conventions have subsequently meant that in writing this research I have also reduced subjective experiences to mere written utterances – or so it feels. My attempt to translate and represent the everyday lives of my participants has meant that “the multitude of expressions, nuances, feelings, of embodiments in the research were lost often because they were unrepresentable” (Skeggs 1997: 11). I have sat comfortably at my desk, typed up transcripts littered with tears of pleasure, pain and possibility often finding myself stuck in my writing many times unable to find a fitting form of expression to convey adequately and with eloquence the experiences of my participants. Nonetheless, I feel that throughout my thesis I

have recognised difference in my participants' voices and lived experiences and have continuously sought to present those differences in a way that does not re-enforce homogenous social constructions of working-class relations to education; perpetuate negative stereotypes; or reinforces deficit discourses. Throughout my analysis I strived to identify themes that did not conflate participant's experiences. And, if my analytical notes are anything to go by, or rather my 'maps of mess' as I have since dubbed my analytical workings I feel I have done exactly this. Consequently, at times, my writing read (and continues to read) as disparate and deeply contradictory. However, I have come to accept this, as Skeggs' notes "searching for coherence is an impossibility, an ideal and a fantasy" (1997:14). Nonetheless, I hope that those that cast their eye over this thesis recognise, within the pages that follow, my attempt to tell a sociological story that conveys the experiences of my participants, in a way that is sensitive without the sensationalism; that sociologies the pleasures, pains and possibilities that accompany participants' experiences of journeying through the elite Stellar University.

Chapter 3. Racism, Classism and the Politics of Belonging: How Working-Class Student's Experience an Elite University

Introduction

Student A (White British prospective student) "It's alright, it's very green (pauses) country like, with trees and that but I dunno". It was at this point that student B (Black British prospective student) in response to student A visually surveyed the campus. Looking across the centre of campus and turning her body in a 360-degree movement student B replied to her friend "yehhhh (pauses) it's very suburban and white (pauses) not what we are used to at all, you don't feel like you are in one of the country's most ethnically diverse areas for sure" after a short pause student B continued: "but, like, are you ever gonna get that? (pauses) come on now you know the statistics you know that people like us are anomalies in places like these, look how many from our sixth form are going uni let alone somewhere like this". In response, student A replied: "Yeh, I know, just think about what we can do with that piece of paper after we have done our time here".

(Fieldwork Diary September 2016)

In this extract of a guided small group tour of the campus two prospective, female students, currently at sixth form discuss with one another the seemingly homogenous student population at Stellar University. This short conversation is insightful and speaks to many of the themes pervading non-traditional students' experiences of higher education. Within this scene we get a glimpse of the politics of belonging in elite UK universities and of the complexities associated with the movement of habitus across an unfamiliar field. The young women are aware that students from a similar background to theirs are rare at elite Russell Group universities and they are profoundly aware of the incongruence between the field of the elite university and their working-class field of origin. This is the starting point for this chapter which seeks to illuminate the experiences of working-class, first-generation students at an elite university. Throughout, I recognise the continual interplay between the classed, ethnic and gendered identities of participants whilst also paying attention to the way in which welfare, poverty and place compound participants' experiences of Stellar University. I begin by elucidating the way in which Stellar University, as a social space was experienced by participants considering the ways in which race and class shape participants' experience of Stellar University. I then progress to consider the way in which, for a small number of participants their lived experience of university powerfully intersected with their subjectivity as being working-class, first-generation former student of free school meals and a recipient of the welfare state and social housing resident.

“I’ve never seen a black girl”; “Ah you sound so stupid”; “Speak the queens English [...] you fucking common scum”; “Oh my god were you like poor?”

The aforementioned quotations are taken verbatim from a number of participants of my study. Taken together, these and the myriad of other anecdotes that

participants shared make one headline conclusion of this thesis clear. Racism and classism on campus prevails and shapes participants' everyday experiences of Stellar University in profound ways. Discrimination and prejudice within universities is not a novel phenomenon and at present campus culture in both the UK and USA has been accorded a barrage of scholarly lay and media attention (Frazer-Carroll 2018; Nagdee 2018; Peters 2015; Solorzano et al., 2000; Warikoo 2016). In the UK, at the centre of this commentary lay the issue of sexism with much light casted upon the sexism that currently emanates from British universities (Phipps 2016, 2018, Phipps and Young 2015a, 2015b). Whilst this work is of vital importance naming and shaming sexist acts that would otherwise, at large, go unchallenged it is nonetheless alarming that there exists no comparable noise or outrage at the classism and racism that pervade campus cultures; classism, especially, is characterised by a dearth of commentary despite much noise from the student community through mainstream and student press outlets (Arkley 2018; Brown 2017; Gevertz 2014; Kennedy 2018; Noor 2018). Students themselves are forming and growing communities to name and shame racism on campus, to express their communal disaffection and to call for action. Student led campaigns such as 'I too am Oxford' inspired by the '*I, too, am Harvard*' initiative and the 'Why is My Curriculum White' campaign founded at UCL have illuminated the prejudices black and minority ethnic students endure throughout their university experience. However, the legitimacy of their experiences and grievances are often denied and racist incidents within universities are labelled as isolated, one off events. Thus, the increasing visibility of racism within UK universities is seldom the result of institutions themselves holding themselves to account but instead the result of 'student whistle-blowers' who, with a strong social conscience feel compelled to take to social media to publicly call out such

behaviour by posting screengrabs of racist messages, racial epithets and videos of racist chants (Bouattia 2018; Rawlinson 2018) to offer just three contemporary examples. It is only when racist incidents on campus catch the attention of the national media thus bringing the university name into disrepute that such incidents are acknowledged and universities are forced to take action. Classism, however remains largely omitted from collective campus social justice campaigns. Whilst numerous studies have sought to explore the socio-cultural university experiences of working-class students (Abrahams and Ingram 2013; Lehmann 2014, 2013; Loveday 2016; Reay et al., 2009, 2010) there exists somewhat of a dearth of research that systematically explores and gives voice to the way in which class and racism build up and pervade the classroom, corridors, cafes and bars and of the emotional and educational costs of such experiences. It is against this background that this chapter provides an important and timely contribution to ongoing and pressing discussions relating to discrimination on campus. A phenomenon that occurs not only at the Stellar University but pervades university campuses across countries and continents on both sides of the Atlantic (Bouattia 2015; Bhopal 2018, 2016; Burke et al., 2016; Crozier et al., 2016; Mirza 2015; Solorzano et al., 2000)

A White Middle-Class Suburban Bubble

Reflecting upon their early experiences of Stellar University the working-class, first-generation students of this study spoke of their shock at the homogeneity of the student body in relation to class and ethnicity and of the mismatch between the demographics of the university and the wider city. This was often the result of participants coming from ethnically diverse localities themselves, the impression that they formed from university promotional material or due to the

fact that Stellar University was located within an ethnically diverse city or a combination of all three. Despite the fact that the majority of participants were the only one from their family and wider working-class community to attend university they nonetheless entered Stellar University with the expectation that there would be *some* students from a similar socio-economic background. However, this was seldom their experience, there appeared to be ‘no one like them’. Herein lay the first major disjuncture between participant’s field of origin and the unfamiliar field of the elite university. Consequently, like Reay et al.’s (2009) participants they had an “out of field’ experience” (Reay et al., 2009: 1110) upon on arrival at Stellar University. However, in contrast such ‘shock’ was predominantly social rather than academic thus echoing the findings of Kaufman and Feldman (2004). Participants were surprised at the middle-class white-homogeneity of the student body, a theme well matched in existing literature (Abrahams and Ingram 2013; Reay et al., 2009) and a theme pervading participants’ transcripts. For example, Jack a White British student comments that:

Jack: Everyone seems to be pretty much middle-class (pauses) I’ve met a few people from a similar background to me but they are all mature learners. I don’t think I have met a single person who has a similar background to me who are like 18. There are probably some about but I just haven’t met them

(Jack, White British Student)

Luke, a local student who was from an ethnically diverse locality told me that:

I'm not from that far away but it's a different world here. It is just so white. At school I was the white minority, now I am the white majority.

(Luke, White British Local Student)

It was not solely local students that commented on mismatch between the demographics of the Stellar University and the wider city, as Aron told me:

It's diverse yano. But on campus it's really not. It's nothing like that, it's nothing like the wider actual city

(Aron, White British Student)

The above quotes highlight the awareness that Jack, Luke and Aron have with regards to the disjuncture they feel between their working-class field of origin and the middle-class field of the elite university. Immersion into the field of the elite university, by way of the homogenous, white middle-class student populace, had profound implications upon the way in which Stellar University was experienced. Participants evoked a strong sense of alienation when reflecting upon their experience of Stellar University as a social space. Research investigating working-class students' experiences of university have highlighted the way in which they often experience university as a "foreign" environment which in turn leaves them feeling like a cultural outsider (Lehmann 2007, 2009a, 2009b) a phenomenon especially pronounced in elite universities (Aries and Seider 2005; Granfield 1991; Reay et al., 2009) and one evident within this study. Similarly, Taylor and Scurry (2011) have written of the way in which, class differences often leave working-class students feeling like foreigners at

university whereas international students often draw upon their middle-class capitals in order to fit into UK institutions. This was a finding echoed throughout my research and is most evidently articulated when Steve, a local student speaks of how he feels like a stranger on campus:

It does sometimes feel like I am a bit of a foreigner here [...] Even now I still feel like a foreigner here.

(Steve, White British Local Student)

Race was central to participants' discussions of Stellar University for participants from both British and BME backgrounds. When discussing their perceptions of and subsequent experiences once they were at Stellar University a number of students expressed concern regarding dominant conceptualisations of 'the student' at Stellar University and the way in which this seldom translated into reality. A number of participants discussed the way in which the Stellar University "*portrays an image of ethnic diversity in relation to the student body but in reality everyone's mostly white*" (Jamie); of the way in which Stellar University constructs an image of the university as being "*ethnically diverse*" (Jessica); and how, in reality "*much of the ethnicity you see on campus is really international students*" (Lewis). A number of participants found this to be highly problematic, suggesting that such conceptualisation of 'the student' at Stellar University was nothing more than a carefully mastered marketing and student recruitment communications strategy. The following exchange between myself and Daisha a Black British, political sciences student illuminates this:

Daisha: *I always say being an ethnic minority here is the best and worst experience of your life, you might be the only black person on your course, that's a reality for some courses. I tell people the honest truth and parents always, always thank me for it. This is a great place to learn it is a great place to be an ethnic minority but you are still a minority and you are always going to remember that and don't ever let them play you like in the prospectus they going to tell you it's diverse but it's not (pauses) don't ever let them try play you, I don't know no university which is diverse.*

Carli: *I was going to ask you about the prospectus*

Daisha: *It looks diverse (pauses) because they know to put the token Asian person here the token black person here and I need to put the wheelchair girl here and this person here and this person here.*

Carli: *How do you feel about that?*

Daisha: *I feel like it's hellah wrong. If there are only like 20% black people, then tell me that don't lie to me and make me come here on false advertisement because if you've got minorities then say that then say 'do you know what, this is what we are doing' I would respect that more than someone who try and*

come with the token white person, the token black person, the token disabled

[...]

Carli: *Do you feel that the prospectus does give that image then?*

Daisha: *Yes, every uni will try and be like that, every university is going to act like they are diverse. However, if you are smart about it, you'll know it don't look like that (pauses). Don't ever play yourself, come on a normal day at 12 look at lunch time and see how many black people you see and that's how diverse this university is.*

Daisha's words resonate with research that has explored the way in which race and ethnicity structure young people's higher education decision making, issues of access and of their experiences once at university (Archer and Hutchings 2000; Boliver 2016; Reay et al., 2001, 2005, Scandone 2018; Zimdars 2010). Most notably, at the heart of her narrative lay issues pertaining to belonging and isolation for students from BME backgrounds at elite universities and indeed universities per se. Despite the notable increase in black and minority ethnic students progressing to university within the UK and the fact that they are more likely than their white British counterparts to enrol in higher education (Modood 2012), British students from BME backgrounds (especially those from black Caribbean, black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds) remain underrepresented in the UK's prestigious Russell Group universities (Boliver 2016). At the time of writing, the latest data available from HESA demonstrated that, Stellar University was in the lowest quintile for the number

of UK domiciled students from BME backgrounds (HESA 2018) and it is this issue that Daisha's narrative centres on. Daisha's account is particularly interesting, despite being positive about her university learning experience she quickly highlights that being an ethnic minority student on campus at Stellar University is an emotional experience. Daisha distinguishes between 'the truth' as she sees it; that there are few ethnic minority students and the image which Stellar University wishes to circulate; that Stellar University is ethnically diverse. Daisha casts light upon the various ways in which she feels that Stellar University constructs itself as being ethnically diverse and shares with me her reaction to the university prospectus which she argues is imbued with tokenistic images of students from ethnic minority and non-traditional backgrounds. As Daisha comments "*they know to put the token Asian person here the token black person here and I need to put the wheelchair girl here and this person here and this person here*". In Daisha's view such constructions are "*hellah wrong*" and as her quotations suggests 'dupe' students into believing that Stellar University has a large ethnic minority student population. Daisha comments: "*don't lie to me and make me come here on false advertisement*". This comment is interesting on two levels. Firstly, we witness the implicit suggestion that the perceived diversity of the student population was a powerful factor in her decision to attend the Stellar University Secondly, the depiction of Stellar University as comprising of an ethnically diverse student body is interpreted by Daisha as being more than simply misleading. As Daisha understands it, Stellar University are deceptive, they engage in "*false advertising*" and it is here that Daisha's awareness that universities are "market actors in a competitive environment... treat[ing] students as consumers" (Pettinger et al., 2016: 7) is evidenced. Sociological research has demonstrated that non-traditional students desire to 'fit in' profoundly influences the university in which they choose to attend (Reay et al.,

2001, 2005) and of the way in which conceptualisations of ‘the student’ are constructed through university prospectuses, campus tours, talks among other student recruitment materials (Read et al., 2003; Burke 2012; Hinton-Smith, 2012). Given that “universities are *in part* constituted through their promotional materials” (Pettinger et al., 2016: 7) and despite being part of promotional culture (Wernick 1991) they powerfully shape prospective student’s expectations; for the students of this study such expectations was that of social, especially ethnic diversity – a perception that seldom translated into reality upon arrival at Stellar University. The notion that Stellar University is constructed as being an ethnically diverse institution was not solely the impression held by the participants of this study but one that I formed through fieldwork. Throughout the observations of university open days and widening participation events alongside the various conversations I had with widening participation personnel the student populace at the Stellar University was one that was constructed as being ethnically diverse as the below exchange highlights:

Widening Participation Personnel: *You know, it’s good to stress to the students that come here today that Stellar is actually a really diverse university in terms of its demographics [...] You would forgive the (prospective) students for thinking that Stellar University wasn’t diverse and its students were from all the same or very similar backgrounds, it’s not an unreasonable perception. The mass media has focused upon the underrepresentation of students from BME backgrounds, so yes I guess the (prospective) students would assume that Stellar University isn’t very diverse but it is.*

Carli: *So the university is really diverse then? Like, in terms of ethnicity?*

Widening Participation Personnel: *Yes, it is. We have students from African, Caribbean, Pakistani, South Asian, South East Asian backgrounds.*

(Field notes June 2016)

In addition, during my observations of the university open days whilst attending presentations on the various accommodation options available and on campus tours I noticed this same message of ethnic diversity being disseminated. This time the notion that the student body was diverse in ethnicity was communicated in ways more explicit than that I had witnessed before as my field notes below allude to:

We are a culturally and ethnically diverse campus and the various living arrangement options reflect this. We have mixed accommodations and a selection of same sex accommodation options.

(Observation June 2016)

Whilst we cannot accommodate requests from students requesting that they wish to live together the beauty is that you may well up living with someone from a background far removed from that of your own.

(Observation October 2016)

Diverse campus home to students from a range of ethnicities and cultures

(Field notes June 2016)

The data presented above paints a complicated but somewhat clear picture of diversity at the Stellar University. There are stark differences pertaining to the way in which ethnic diversity is understood at Stellar University. Despite dominant conceptualisations of the student body at Stellar University being ethnically diverse this conceptualisation seldom existed in reality from the perspective of the working-class, first-generation participants of this study; a perspective held by both white and BME student participants. For the participants of this study (white or BME), when they spoke of ethnic diversity it was immediately apparent that they were referring to the number of UK domiciled BME students at Stellar University. International students from BME backgrounds were understood as comprising a distinct student group at Stellar University. Whereas, for Stellar University, its university personnel and campus tour guides, ethnic diversity was understood to encompass both UK domiciled BME students and the international student body. How the, does one explain such difference in understanding?

Despite the international BME student body at Stellar University, the working-class, first-generation students of this study still felt profoundly underrepresented, they seldom saw diversity. Given this, might social class be the underlying driver fuelling alienation non-belonging? I want to argue yes; social class is the unspoken position. A working-class identity, habitus, the

associated class-cultural discontinuities when habitus enters the field of elite higher education in addition to a lack of economic, social and cultural capital often serves as a ‘barrier’ to fitting in and belonging at university (Abrahams and Ingram 2013; Aries and Seider 2005; Benediktsson 2012; Granfield 2011; Lee and Kramer 2013; Lenhmann 2007, 2014; Reay et al., 2009, 2010; Stuber 2012; Torres 2009). International BME students, in comparison often have recourses that they are able to convert into capital, materially and culturally so as to facilitate acculturation into the dominant culture of the elite educational settings (Holloway et al., 2012; Waters 2005). Whilst I do not wish to homogenize complex classed and racial intersections of international student experiences existing research highlights the way in which international mobility within education (re)produces social class advantage and class distinctions (Brooks and Waters 2011, 2018; Findlay et al., 2012) and correlates with a privileged social background (Finn and Darmody 2017).

Race and Racism in the Curriculum and on Campus

Unlike the white working-class first-generation students of this study whose concerns regarding Stellar University were predominantly social for the black minority ethnics working-class first-generation students’ issues pertaining to the politics of belonging with elite higher education also encompassed the credentialed curriculum. Research highlights that the university lecture hall and seminar room is not a race-neutral space but rather entrenched in the political (Chan et al., 2014) and academics of colour have written of the ‘harsh realities’ of higher education (Niemann 2012). These include, but are not limited to the way in which, within the university classroom: students express white guilt; confront privilege; challenge the authority of the educator; and how academics

of colour are often required to mentally prepare themselves for hostile teaching environments (Bhopal 2016; Chan et al., 2014; Puwar 2004a; Sian 2017; Vo 2012). For BME students, the university experience, both socially and academically is characterised but not limited to the BME attainment gap; biased marking; hate crime on campus; the historical omission of BME history; the inclusion of problematic teaching materials; misrecognition and a dearth of back academics (Bouattia 2015; Bhopal 2018, 2016; Burke et al., 2016; Crozier et al., 2016; Mirza 2015; Rollock 2007; 2016; 2019). Participants from a BME background often spoke about their disappointment of course content, its lack of diversity and of the ways in which academic material was overwhelmingly white and Eurocentric. They spoke of how the perspectives of non-white thinkers and scholars were omitted from course reading lists and assessment questions pertaining to non-white scholars or grappling with issues pertaining to race were non-existent. These issues are not unique to Stellar University but are systematic to UK higher education as the recent ‘Why is My Curriculum White? - Decolonising the Academy’ (UCLTV 2014) campaign launched at University College London and taken up by the National Union of Students has cast light upon. It was not uncommon for students from ethnic minority backgrounds to report feelings of alienation, frustration and disillusionment with the lack of critical engagement with race, ethnicity and postcolonial issues, their histories and cultures unrepresented. The comment from Faith, a Black British humanities student is illustrative:

I’ve even said to my lecturers that you need to put more black literature on the table. This is why black people don’t want to study anymore because it is very white centric and it’s not to be in a racist way, I am black I want to learn about my history is that okay with you and when I get to university I should be able to

do so (pauses) one of my lectures has made a new essay question based on black literature because I complained so much. Even now I'll be the only one answering that question but I will be answering it.

Stereotypes were all pervasive in both social and academic life at Stellar University. shared an array of instances where she herself was viewed through the lens of stereotypes. Within the examples below we witness the intricate and insidious ways in which stereotypes pertaining to class, ethnicity place and space compound and pervaded both her social and academic experiences at Stellar University:

Faith: There was one girl, we're not friends now, who when I told her where I was from she was like 'Isn't that where people get mugged?' and I literally said to her, 'I've lived on my estate my whole life and I have like never been mugged, I've never been raped, I've never been stabbed, I have never been shot at, I have never had a burglary', it's just it's overcoming the stereotypes.

Daisha also spoke of the way in which academia was complicit in perpetuating negative stereotypes of people from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds through course content such as lecture material, required readings and assessments:

[...] in lectures sometimes the way we are portrayed is of a certain standard I'm just like 'we don't live like that'. Like in my first year a guy from a politics module had a poster of south London ironically on a road I recognised and it had a girl pregnant, a boy with a gold tooth, hoody up like all those stereotypes and I had to tell him 'Sorry, let me just cut this class quick'. I literally said to the lecturer, 'How dare you put up a poster from my area where people do not

look like that', like it actually disgusted me to a serious level...it perpetuates a stereotype of how some people are, how they speak and where they come from, what area they come from and I, as a person from that area cos I recognise the road feel offended. I don't know if he has changed it or not because after that lecture I nearly stopped going [...]

Similarly, reflecting upon course content Faith also told me:

Universities don't realize the way in which they perpetuate stereotypes of people from a lower class on to other people because they don't realise who they are dealing with because obviously as a lecturer you don't see where someone is coming from you just see your own path or you only see the way you are teaching you don't realise how it can actually effect a student.

The inclusion of and perpetuation of negative stereotypes of people from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds (and those from other marginal groups) within the university curricula should not be overlooked. For Daisha it had powerful effects, it evoked anger and a reluctance to attend lectures owing to the emotive space of the classroom (Mirza and Meeto 2012). As Faith, pointed out that lecturers “*don't realise how it can actually effect a student*” but they should. This raises questions pertaining to inclusivity within the curriculum, as Mirza (2015:28) writes: “if we are serious about widening participation, we need to ask ‘what are our principles of anti-racist professional and academic engagement, and how do we arrive at them?’”. I argue that social inclusion and justice must lay at the core of higher education pedagogy if we are to ensure quality and inclusivity of experience within higher education. Students from working-class, low income and ethnic minority backgrounds all too often are required to navigate an array of stereotypes throughout their time at university and racism on campus not only pervaded the academic life of participants but

the social life too. For Daisha, the politics of belonging and misrecognition interplayed with her subjectivity as a black student. Here, within her account we gain a strong sense of both the judgment that she feels and the anger when her presence is indirectly questioned by a fellow white middle-class student:

Daisha: *I remember literally the first time I came a girl said to me 'I've never seen a black girl before' (pauses) and I was just like ummm what (pauses)*

Carli: *How did you respond?*

Daisha: *I was like 'hi we are here' (laughs), you just have to be like 'hi, hello' (laughs). She was saying it like part fascination part sarcasm as in she wasn't expecting to see a black student in the same class as her. And I was like 'hi I am here'. Like the way I see it is I am in the same classroom as you we are on the same level (pauses) the fact that you can even question my presence (pauses) is rude and I don't care what social class you are from we are still in the same room meaning we did something to get here... regardless of whether I got here with money or not student finance is still paying my loan it will still get written off at some point and Daddy hasn't paid for anything like I am working through it so don't judge me [...]*

In the above extract Daisha speaks of the way in which her peer “wasn't expecting to see a black student in the same class” whilst also making reference to her social class positioning. Puwar (2004b) has written of the way in which, in White dominated settings, White people often feel ‘discomfort’ by the presence of BME people. Within this examples, race is the primary lens through which she, a working-class, first-generation student at an elite university was made to feel ‘Other’. As Daisha shares, she was the subject of “fascination”, as Said (2003) has written, minority ethnic individuals appear fascinatingly strange

and entertaining. She does not embody the identity of the ‘typical’ university student and is thus constituted as ‘Other’. Daisha was marked out as being different she was thus misrecognized. As Burke (2015: 393-294) has written of misrecognition:

Misrecognition is a potent concept to help shed light on the subtle and insidious ways that different bodies and personhoods (or subjectivities) are positioned, constructed and mobilized across pedagogical spaces through practices of symbolic violence, such as shaming. In such contexts, students marked out as different are continually at risk of being relocated as ‘undeserving’ and ‘unworthy’ of higher education participation.

I have highlighted various ways in which race and racism operated on campus and of the various ways in which Daisha navigated university amidst a background of stereotypes and misrecognitions. Discourses and university practices contribute actively to the misrecognition and stereotyping of those who are marked as the ‘Other’ within academia just as the work of Burke (2015); Crozier et al., 2016; and Read et al., (2003) demonstrate. Whilst BME applicants from black Caribbean, black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds are more likely than their white British counterparts to enrol in higher education (Maddood 2012) “ethnic minority applicants to Russell Group universities are less likely to receive admissions offers than their comparably qualified white applicants” (Boliver 2016: 247). Consequently, universities, especially elite universities have remained, as Alexander and Arday (2015: 4) argue “for the most part Ivory towers’ – with the emphasis on ‘ivory’”. However, the data from this study and the tales that participants told demonstrate that being of ivory skin does not ensure ease of experience – a phenomenon that I shall now discuss.

“You Fucking Common Scum”: Classism within and Beyond Campus

Would you wear a Hijab, paint your face black or dress up as a “tranny”? I don't think so. Most Millennials consider sexism and racism as despicable. We wouldn't dare invoke “fancy dress” upon them, so why do we think classism is acceptable? (Arkley 2018)

In March 2018, the University of Leeds University Women's Hockey Club was the subject of much critique. The club was banned from partaking in competitions and its social secretaries were removed from their positions as a result of a 'chav themed social' that the sports society initiated and hosted. As part of the 'chav night' the “educated fair maidens, studying in one of the countries grandest universities” (as they described themselves) were told to dress as 'lower class', engage in ASBO behavior, take off their “Daddy's Debutant Ball present of Jimmy Chou's and throw on Primark's own leopard print Uggs” and “step out... [with] luminous underwear on show” (Arkley 2018). This came just a few months after the University of Birmingham student's union also dominated headlines for hosting a 'chav night' themed social (Paxton 2017). Numerous students made complaints to the union, some publicly voicing their dissatisfaction, outrage and disgust at an event which they deemed to be classist and discriminatory. The point was made that 'chav night' created an environment where low income students not only felt unwelcomed on campus but that actively fostered a climate of hostility to those from low income backgrounds. Such complaints, rather than being met with outrage and disgust

from the wider student body were mocked on social media and in the national press as were the individuals who voiced complaints (Barradale and Kaplan 2017; Turner 2017). ‘Fucking melt’ and ‘fucking dickhead’ are just two of the comments directed at those that had voiced their objection. These two recent examples provide a window into the way in which classism pervades campus culture within UK higher education and of the way in which classism within elite Russell Group universities has recently been the subject of much debate within the student community understood by some as harmless fun and fiercely critiqued by others. Despite being the subject of much debate from within the student community there exists somewhat of a dearth of academic research that has sought to systematically explore the way in which class, as a social location is subject to prejudice, discrimination and oppression within UK universities. The impact of classism upon individuals’ experience of higher education is largely omitted from academic debate. For the participants of this study classism occurred, both implicitly and explicitly, at the micro and macro level and permeated participant’s everyday mundane interactions ranging from the social, the romantic and the academic. For example, when asked what impression of the university he had, Steve, a local student recalled an incident from his first year at Stellar University when a classmate had corrected him on his pronunciation of the word graph. As Steve tells me:

‘When you are in England you speak the queen’s English.’ And I said, ‘When you’re in this city you accept that people don’t sound like the queen.’ He came right up to my face and said, ‘You what?’ and I was like, ‘Are you squaring up?’ and he was like, ‘Do not speak about my queen like that...’ and I was like, ‘It’s not your queen’, and he looked proper offended and he looked like he was

about to hit me, and I was ready for it if he did. I wasn't going to retaliate but I would have got out the way and he was like so angry with me and he was like 'You fucking common scum' and all this, and I was like, 'Oh okay.' And that was my first true experience here of that kind of like attitude.

Similarly, Joe, when asked whether he felt that he had been treated differently or put down because of his working-class background recalled his experience of dating a female peer from his course. Whilst Joe does not explicitly inform me that his partner broke up with him because he was working-class his account nonetheless suggests an understanding that this was the case. As Joe tells me:

I was seeing this girl last year from Oxford, from a very nice part of Oxford, quite middle-class. Mum and Dad quite well off. Whenever I was with her and her parents were about I was just her friend, nothing more than that [...] I don't think her parents would like, they are very, they are upper-class. She didn't want them to know about me kinda thing. I was a secret.

However, not all classist interactions were so overt, nor were they always directed at the students themselves. Reflecting upon how her class background had impacted upon her experience of Stellar University Jessica, another student reported the following which highlights the stereotyping of space and place:

Jessica: I have herd lots of comments and stuff in the background (pauses)

Carli: *What sort of things?*

Jessica: *[...] a lot of it about people being unemployed about pretty much, about people being on the dole and a lot about the city itself and how it's all full of like stupid people, scum and this stuff and that they should just burn it down and start again and stuff like that [...]*

Throughout fieldwork, participants demonstrated an articulate awareness of how unlikely their attendance at the Stellar University was and of the complex histories of classed and raced (albeit not exclusively) exclusions and inequalities that has characterised UK higher education per se. Participants were aware of the continued speckled presence of working-class, first-generation students at Stellar University, that they comprise a minority within Stellar University and at elite Russell Group universities per se. This was a fact that were constantly reminded of by their middle-class university peers, as I shall now discuss throughout the remainder of this chapter. Littered within participants' narratives were the numerous and various ways in which they were misrecognised within the elite university as a result of their working-class identity as well as the politics of belonging that take place at the intersections of difference. Within Jack's lengthy but illuminating account below we witness the way in which misrecognition and the politics of belonging interplays with classed and gendered subjectivities.

Jack: *A couple of people that I have been introduced to in the pub when I've*

gone to talk to people they didn't believe that I was at the university. They started grilling me about my course.

Carli: Ok, so people from uni that you have met in the pub?

Jack: No this one was in halls actually. I don't know why she didn't believe me because I was in halls. This was like a night out or something and she was like, 'Oh what do you do?' and she was – I think she was friends of someone there and everyone was talking and I was talking – and she was like, 'Oh what do you do?' and I was like, 'I'm doing English Lit' and she was like 'You're at the university? [pause] Are you sure?' and then she was like, 'What you studying?' then and I was like, 'Philosophy' and she was like, 'Oh what philosophers are you studying, then?' and I was like, 'Descartes, Hobbes etc.'. Then I was like, 'Why, why don't you even believe me?'. I didn't know that. Like it's become more apparent to me like the longer I have been here it's become more apparent to me that I do sound very different to everyone else [...] and then the other time I think I was in the pub and there was a girl ordering a drink and she was like, 'Oh hey, what you doing at university?' She was doing medicine and so we talked about that and she was like, 'Oh, so you are a local then, what do you do?' and I was like, 'No, I'm at the university too' and she was like 'Really, you sure?' Cos obviously we are at a bar and she is probably just thinking, 'Oh he is trying to just chat me up or something' or 'he's just trying to blag' and I was like, 'Well yeh, I am at the university' but umm yeh, it's just (pauses).

Jack's account is interesting. His legitimacy as student at the Stellar University is called into question during his time socialising in the student night-time economy in spaces both on and off campus. In both of the anecdotes shared above Jack is accused of lying about his student status. It is interesting to note that in both interactions Jack is conversing with female Stellar University students and how this shapes his initial understanding as to why his legitimacy as a Stellar University student is questioned. Jack explains the "*grilling*" that he gets from acquaintances through a discourse of the (hetero)sexual pursuit of women. Upon revealing that he too attends the university he is asked: "*you're' are the university, are you sure*" and "*are you sure*". As Jack initially understands it, he is being quizzed on his student status as his acquaintances are "*probably just thinking oh he is trying to just chat me up or something*". The implication is that that he is lying about being a university student in order to pursue the young women. As Reay (2002) notes, sexism and the (hetero)sexual pursuit of women (alongside racism and homophobia to name just a few) have long formed part of the dominant version of white working-class masculinities homogenising working-class young men in many academic accounts. Such understanding of working-class masculinity has permeated much academic research exploring working-class young men's relationships to education. From Willis (1977) 'lads' to Mac an Ghail's (1994) 'Macho Lads' whose masculine identities via a particularly symbolic display of working-class masculinity; that is, through "the three F's - fighting, fucking and football" (1994: 56). More recently, Ward's (2013, 2014) ethnography of young working-class men in a post-industrial community in the South Wales Valleys found that even the 'working-class geeks' are under "pressure to conform to heterosexual practices, to hold the male gaze and to objectify women [...] to live the heterosexual fantasy and act like

the ‘real’ men that their marginalised geeky position did not often allow.” (Ward 2014: 721).

Working-class boys have long been conceptualised within academic literature as being highly resistant to schooling “associating education with ‘femininity’ and ‘middle-classness’ and as incompatible with working-class discourses of ‘hard’ masculinity” (Archer et al., 2001: 433). Moreover, in the post-industrial era where working-class young men operate through an economy of aesthetics (Connell 2001) class location becomes judged through consumption and cultural forms. And as Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2011: 736) argue “aggressive sexualities become emblematic of a (lack of) self-management of working-class young men”. The implication is that that Jack is lying about being a university student in order to pursue the young women which in turn speaks to the gendered as well as the classed politics of belonging within elite universities; Jack is positioned as being ‘out of place’ in the university setting. He does not embody the ‘authentic’ student whose subjectivity is white and middle-class (Archer and Hutchings 2000; Read et al., 2003; Tett; 2000) and so he must be lying in order to impress. After all, as Stahl (2016: 663) writes in relation to education “white working-class boys in the United Kingdom are frequently labelled as having ‘low aspirations’ or, indeed, no aspirations at all”.

Being Working-Class, a Recipient of Welfare and Educationally Successful at Stellar University

Katie: *I just wouldn't ever openly be like 'yeh I am from a really poor family a poor area'. I don't really, I dunno I just don't want people to know.*

Carli: *Why do you think that is?*

Katie: *It's just quite embarrassing isn't it. That I'm really poor (pauses) that I come from a council estate. I just think that if you're talking to someone who's from a really nice house, got money and I'm from a council estate they'll just be like urgh and just look at us [...]*

The comment above is typical of the responses of the students from Stellar University whom simultaneously inhabit two irreconcilable fields that stand in stark opposition to one another. The first, a vilified council 'sink estate' the second the elite site of the university, the former characterised by poverty and the latter opulence as Katie's words allude to. Unlike the findings of Granfield (1991) and Skeggs (1997a) who found that the working-class participants of their study sought to dis-identify from and outright conceal their working-class social positioning within further and elite higher education respectively within my study few participants spoke of the way in which they actively sought to conceal or downplay their working-class background. Far more spoke candidly about the way in which their identity as a former student of free school meals, recipient of the welfare state and social housing resident was one that they either

sought to actively conceal or revealed only to those considered to be close friends. For some this was a decision rooted in shame and embarrassment, for others, aware of the discrimination on campus and throughout wider society owing to contemporary portrayals of people living with poverty and on welfare (for in depth critical discussion of the proliferation of such representations see Allen et al., 2014; De Benedictis et al., 2017; Jensen 2014a; Tyler 2014) it was a vital strategy to safeguard their wellbeing and to facilitate their inclusion for reasons I discuss below. When participants were not able to, or chose not to conceal aspects of their background they found that they were often subject to classist micro-aggressions; a common consequence of being working-class and coming from poverty in an environment populated by the white middle-classes who had seldom met an individual from a background where economic precarity and uncertainty was somewhat the norm. Jack, a white working-class student reflects upon his experience of sharing with his close university friends the fact that he was the recipient of free school meals, which is interpreted by his university peers as symbolizing his background as one characterised by poverty:

Jack: My friend (begins to laugh) my friend he is a really good chap and close friend and we were in the pub and he was a bit drunk and we were talking cos like I said I am the only one that smokes and he asked me how long I have been smoking for and urm (laughs) I was like for about fifteen years now since I was 14 and he was like 'oh my god Jack were you like a problem child I bet you had like free school meals at school too' and I was just like yup I did (laughs) and he was like 'oh my god were you like poor Jack' (laughs). He said that. I mean, he meant it in a nice way he is a really friendly chap but it was just really funny how he has considered [pauses] why or how he would even guess I

was on free school meals because I had been smoking since I was 14. That made me laugh I thought that was hilarious.

Carli: *So when you told him you were on free school meals what was he like?*

Jack: *I think he was a bit shocked and then like I said he was a bit like ‘oh my God you’re like family are poor’. I think my other friend was like proper gobsmacked, he was like ‘Jacks poor, Jacks poor’. But obviously they mean it in a nice way (pauses) if they didn’t I’d be angry about it but it’s just a joke we all make fun of each other, it’s banter.*

Jack’s narrative reveals how he was positioned by his university peers through certain classist stereotypes but also the way in which performances of masculinity are acceptable in different fields and how Jack uses humour as a defensive mechanism to navigate the derogatory and class shaming he endures from his peers and to defuse the tension of being mocked. In the above exchange smoking is synonymous with being a problem child which in turn is understood as also going hand in hand with coming from poverty and receiving welfare or at least this is how it is understood within the context of the above interaction by Jack’s peers. Jack’s peers evidence an implicit understanding of an entrenched sub-culture of dysfunctionality that goes hand in hand with being ‘poor’. Although not directly articulated there are echos of the ‘troubled families’ narrative that came into the public consciousness in the aftermath of the English riots in 2011 (Bristow 2013 and Crossley 2016) which identifies deviant families of which need to be ‘contained’ (Bristow 2013). Anti-school, anti-social behaviour, ‘unruly’ children, delinquency and welfare dependency are just some

of the characteristics of ‘troubled families’ (Crossley 2016). Such narrative has been fiercely critiqued from sociologist due to its strong narrative of the culturalisation of poverty (Jensen 2013; Tyler 2013) and dysfunctionality that takes place within and results from ‘the family’ (Crossley 2016). It is in this way that age old stereotypes surrounding social class are evoked from the Victorian ‘residuum’ (Crossick 1991; Mazumdar 1980), the Edwardian ‘unemployables’ (Stedman-Jones 1984; Welshman, 2006) and the interwar ‘social problem group’ (Jones 1986; Macnicol 1989; Welshman 2013). However, the reaction of Jack’s peers is most interesting, they position Jack as being a ‘problem child’ in the past as implied by the comment “*were you like a problem child*” and this is no careless slip of the tongue. Yet there are seldom any references to Jack’s “*problem child*” ways in the present thus signifying an understanding of who Jack is in the present being a sharp break away from who Jack was in the past. I want to argue that Jack is being positioned by his peers as ‘becoming’ something and someone different to who he once was. Social mobility as some scholars have argued “usually implies a process of detachment from, and attachment to, particular class cultures” (Friedman 2014: 133) and masculinity as both a class culture and strategy of resistance is central here within Jack’s anecdote as I shall now discuss.

Schooling and masculinity are key sites where competing masculinities gain legitimacy through peer cultures (Mac and Ghail 1994). And as Connell (1989); Mac an Ghail (1994); Martino (1999); Phoenix (2004); Willis (1977) have illustrated, for some young working-class men masculinity was constructed through an opposition to the values of education, school authority and academic success. For Willis (1997) such phenomenon was conceptualized as being an

anti-school sub culture and was synonymous with being a 'lad'. Willis's 'lads' were aware of the illusionary nature of equal opportunity within the capitalist system and the false promise of education. For the 'lads' of Willis' study, "the possibility of real upward mobility seems so remote as to be meaningless" (1997: 126). Thus, it is in this vein that for Willis the lads' "refusal to compete, implicit in the counter school culture, is therefore in the sense a radical act: it refuses to collude in its own educational suppression" (1997: 128). Through earlier discussions with Jack it was clear that he adopted an anti-school subculture, he was one of Willis's lads and that this was the valued and hegemonic masculinity in Jack's earlier field of his working-class, failing secondary school. However, in the middle-class field of the elite university an anti-school subculture was seldom viewed as being an accepted form of masculinity. Being a 'problem child' is afforded no kudos at the Stellar University, it is not a legitimate form of masculinity and it thus subject to mockery. Within this example, masculinity powerfully intersects with class and deeply classist stereotypes surrounding welfare dependency and delinquency are drawn upon as a site of banter.

Jack's earlier life biography is mocked and made fun off, his friends repeatedly make jokes about his economically precarious upbringing, there is no sympathy for the structural inequalities faced. Whilst class is not directly articulated in the above example it is nonetheless cited in unspoken ways, namely through exclusion and lack. Specifically, in the example above, Jack's class is signalled and subsequently mocked because Jack did not have access to high (or even moderate) economic capital, a finding mirroring the earlier work of Skeggs (1997a) and because he did not display the hegemonic masculinity that is valued

within middle-class field of Stellar University. Jack responds to this class shaming from his peers by brushing it off as humorous ‘banter’ insisting that it’s all a joke and that his peers “*mean it in a nice way*”. Here, humour arises in response to the tension endured; as a strategy to maintain status among his peer group; to defuse the tension and the anger that Jack would otherwise feel; and finally as a way to conform to the dominant masculinity that operates within the field of the elite university. Jack’s past behaviour is labelled as ‘*problem child*’ thus signalling that this type of masculinity, that of Willis’s (1997) lads is not considered to be legitimate within the field of the university and among his university peer group. Humour, alongside the recently popularised term ‘banter’ and masculinity, has occupied somewhat of a central place within the sociology of education. As Kehily and Nayak (1997: 69) argued over two decades ago “humour plays a significant part in consolidating male peer group cultures in secondary schools, offering a sphere for conveying masculine identities”. By making a joke out of a conversation that could have otherwise turned tense Jack uses his humour as a mechanism by which he is able to navigate and defuse the classism that he is the centre of whilst also, to some extent adhering to the dominant masculinity of the field. Humour here is understood as both a coping strategy; a ‘reactionary effect’ (Walkerdine 1990) and a product of masculine display and as class cultural tensions within the field of elite higher education.

In a joint interview with Luke and his partner his partner comments that “*sometimes, when people come to university they just want to forget about their class background, where they’re from*”. However, the majority of the participants of this study were unable to simply forget about their class background upon entering the Stellar University. Instead, for a number of

participants their lived experience of elite university powerfully intersected with their subjectivity as being a working-class, first-generation former student of free school meals and a recipient of the social protection and social housing. It is impossible to write about how the participants of this study who had been recipients of social welfare experienced Stellar University without writing about the political, popular and media discourses surrounding the welfare state that were circulating. At the time of conducting my fieldwork there had been the proliferation in the mainstream media of what sociologist Tracey Jensen (2014a) has termed 'poverty porn'. Poverty porn typically 'documents' the experiences of the poor, exploring the lives of families and individuals as they attempt to get by on welfare. As Jensen notes: "it is through the explosion of 'poverty porn' television that welfare discourses of political elites have become translated into authoritarian vocabularies. Poverty porn television is not simply voyeurism, but performs an ideological function; it generates a new 'common sense' around an unquestionable need for welfare reform; it makes a neoliberal welfare 'doxa'" (2014a: 2). At the time of fieldwork and indeed now at the time of writing, in contemporary Britain the genre of poverty porn is a central mechanism used to "politically justify austerity policies" (Dowling and Harvie 2014: 875) for the participants of such programs are blamed for their circumstances not of their own choosing and are scapegoats for the ills and inequalities that prevail under the crisis of financial capitalism. Such programs enable "structural conditions of a deep social, political and economic crises' to be imagined as problems of 'individual behaviours'" (Dowling and Harvie 2014: 872 cited in Tyler 2015) and projected as a moral crisis. Typically, such programmes are set on 'sink estates' with stark visual imagery of architectural decay, vandalism and environmental degradation accompanied by a narrative of intergenerational worklessness, petty criminality and anti-social behaviour; the participants of such programmes are

portrayed as being work-shy, morally lax, hostile to education and schooling and lacking aspiration or the desire to ‘do well’. Thus, within the public imagination, welfare recipients and council estates are no longer the utopian vision of post war equality, but instead are the symbolic and ideological marker of spatialised ‘dysfunctionality’ and all that is wrong with the welfare state (Hanley 2007; Slater 2018; Jensen and Tyler 2015). This has led some sociologists such as Tracey Jensen (2014b) to argue that the:

programme’s ideological message(es) are clear; worth comes from paid work and not from childrearing or volunteering; unemployment is a problem of will or determination and not of structural obstacles; and social security itself generates the ‘problem’ of welfare dependence

Participants spoke of the stigma they had faced at university as a result of their social housing occupancy. It was clear from participants’ narratives that that their university peers were receptive to the anti-welfare, anti-social tenant rhetoric circulating in media, political and lay discourse at the time as the comments of Katie and Steve highlight. Participants’ responses illustrated their conscious desire and efforts to conceal the fact that they lived or had lived in social housing on a social housing estate when among their university peers. For some participants the fact that they lived in social housing was an aspect of their classed identity and personal biography that they did not share with anyone at all during their time at university. For other participants it was a fact that they only shared with those that they considered to be their closest friends whereas for others it was an aspect of their identity that was revealed to their peers over

time. The fact that participants were former and/or current recipients of social protection payments or had lived in social housing on a social housing estate did for some have negative implications upon their university friendships. Steve, a local student Stellar University recalls how he came to fall out with his housemate Alistair of two years after finding a note in Alistair's room that read "make room Steve-proof". Alistair had insisted that Steve be given a key to his room owing to the fact that the internet was located in Alistair's room. As Steve himself tells me:

I never know if he did this on purpose or not but inevitably the internet went down and he was one for making lists. So I went to the room to turn the internet on and on his desk was a list and I was like ahhh lets see what's on his list today because there was funny thing on there and then there was one that said 'make room Steve-proof' and at first I was like oh ok. So even though he had given me his key he wanted to make sure there was nothing I could steal. In his room. So I started to feel a bit like, at first it didn't bother me. But then I was like actually this is quite offensive I'm a 26-year-old man nobody needs to make their room Steve-proof like I am not a child I'm not going to go in there and things are going to fall off the walls and it was just like (long pause) I never felt so childed in my life I felt (long pause) I didn't really want to tell anyone because I felt really offended but it seemed really petty but then when I told people about it they were like no actually no when you think about that its actually really offensive. He tried to laugh it off but I was like this is it this end here we are not friends anymore.

Here we witness in Steve's words an amalgamation of shame, confusion and

ambivalence. Confusion is evidenced when Steve himself asks: “*What did ‘make room Steve-proof mean’?*” Did Alistair want to make sure that there was nothing that Steve could steal? Or was it simply more innocent than that? As Steve states “*I never felt so childed in my life*”. In the first instance Steve isn’t ‘bothered’ and he interprets the incident as being humorous commenting that it’s not like his presence in the room will make things simply fall off the wall. However, it is here, at this point that Steve’s words reveal the reimagining of Alistair not as a joke but as something slightly more sinister in its undertone although Steve is somewhat hesitant to share said interpretation with me, labelling his own reaction as something that ‘*seems really petty*’. Whilst the note is a source of anger and embarrassment for Steve he only understands his feelings being rational when they are legitimized by his peers. Steve continues and reflecting upon the incident tells me:

He tried to sit next to me in a math’s revision lecture and he sat next to me and I was like no Alistair you are not sitting next to me and his mates were there and he was trying to show off in front of them and he kept trying to sit next to me so I said what he had done and they were all like ahh Alistair you are a dick... cos everyone knew at this point knew I was from a council estate and they all had accepted it and they were all like it’s not on its not on Alistair.

Thus, the suggestion here is that Alistair’s ‘make room Steve-proof note’ was the result of the fact that Steve was from a council estate. This is not something that Steve himself outright claims nor tells me from the outset but is conveyed through his university peers’ reactions despite being aware of the stigma and

discrimination he faced as a result of his background, as Steve himself tells me describing the incident:

That's, that's classist or something like that. That's the thing I tried to brush it off as like his weird habits but then I started to think that it's not his weird habits it's just his bigotry

Working-Class Students: 'A Different Type of Mind'

Central to post-war Britain was the establishment of free and compulsory education through the inception of the 1944 Butler Education Act and establishment of the Tripartite System. Admission to school type was based upon one's performance in the 11 plus 'intelligence' examination, an academic selection test reflective of the notion that there existed "different types of minds" which required different types of education. Against this backdrop grammar schools were heralded as engines of social mobility affording "gifted" working-class students' educational opportunities that otherwise would have seldom been available to them and were credited with providing platform of which one was able to 'educate themselves out' and thus transcend the parameters of working-class life. Despite the abolishment of the tripartite system I have argued (Rowell 2017) and wish to continue to argue that the perception that there exists 'different types of minds' and the discourse of the 'gifted' working-class student was never entirely confined to history. I argue that in recent years there has been a revival of the different type of mind discourse. Sol Gamsu (2017) has argued that within the UK, elite universities have replaced the role of the grammar school in providing working-class students access to a middle-class form of education. As

a consequence there has been the reemergence of what Gamsu calls the “scholarship boy discourse”, a discourse that never truly went away. He argues that:

The logic and implied class-ism of “raising up” a gifted few through the 11+ was never completely lost and has returned with a vengeance in the widening participation discourse at certain elite universities [...] The structural logic that was at work has not disappeared from our education system. As the schools and universities have expanded, this ‘logic of the ladder’, and the insidious ideological alibi that it provides, has simply moved upwards. It is no longer entry to grammar school where this filter of social selection and limited diversification of the middle and upper classes occurs, instead it is our elite universities who have taken over this function, and it is widening participation (WP) that has allowed them to do it (Gamsu 2017)

Indeed, the idea that there exists ‘different types of minds’ is ever present throughout the various marketing, student recruitment and widening participation literature of Stellar University. Specifically, Stellar University, like all other Russell Group universities are openly highly selective in their admissions seeking only to admit the “*most able*” and the “*most determined*”. Stellar University is constructed as being home to “*the best minds*” and thus the type of mind that is capable of rivalling previous “*prominent thinkers*” that the UK has “*produced*”. The construction of ‘the student’ at Stellar University as being the most intellectually able is further evidenced throughout the welcome message from the Vice Chancellor. The Stellar University is branded as elite in

intellectualism, only to those who possesses the required intellectual capabilities are admitted to Stellar University. In each and every sentence of the welcome message(s) notions of elite intellectualism are conveyed. For example, the welcome message(s) speaks of the “*outstanding educational experience delivered by excellent teachers*”; it stresses that “*bold, independent thinking*” is encouraged alongside the commitment to “*stretch and challenge*” students and makes the commitment to provide the platform from which students are able to excel when the welcome message informs students that Stellar University is a place to “*continue to unlock your potential*”. There is seldom any reference to diversity except in terms of internationalism. Instead the student populace at Stellar University is described primarily through language that connotes academic brilliance: “*a community of brilliant, creative people*” to give just one example. Here I want to argue that it is evident that intellectualism comes before inclusion. Even across the widening participation material constructions of ‘the student’ at Stellar University as being the most intellectually able are ever-present. Explicit references are made about Stellar University dominating the higher echelons of various national and global university rankings, about the way in which the university “*nurtures talent*” and of the way in which Stellar University is “*providing opportunities for the best minds from all backgrounds*”. Moreover, widening participation initiatives are credited as ensuring that the “*most able*”, the most “*determined*” pupils are able to receive and “*benefit from a university education, regardless of their personal or financial situation*”. It is herein that the “scholarship boy discourse” (Gamsu 2017) is most explicitly espoused. Only the most academically able and determined students from non-traditional backgrounds may be admitted to the Stellar University.

Exploring the complexities of working-class educationally successful teenage boys at a Grammar school in Northern Ireland Ingram asks, “whether it is possible to be working class and clever; or more accurately, whether it is possible to be perceived as working class and perceived as clever?” (2011: 288). For the participants of my study this was a question that pervaded their experience of Stellar University. *“What are you even doing here?”; “How did you get in here?”; “Did you get in with lowered A level grades?”* were all questions the working-class, first-generation students were asked throughout their time at Stellar University. Within the middle-class site of the elite university campus in both sites of academic work and sociability participants were seldom viewed as being academically able by their middle-class peers. It seemed that intellectual ability and academic success was incongruent with being working-class, embodying a working-class culture and expressing a working-class identity. But that was not all. Space and place also played a part and for some participants their university middle-class peers could not fathom the fact that they had lived, grown up, resided and continued to reside (both during and out of term time) on a council estate. This was expressed in both overt and covert ways, explicitly stated and implicitly implied. Robert recalls an instance during his second year when a classmate received a lower grade than him. As Robert told me about a course peer:

He was furious absolutely furious and he turned around and said ‘My dad paid 30,000 per year for my education and what did you pay? Nothing so why have you got better grades than me?’ and I just looked at him and I was like ‘because I am smarter’ and he was like ‘you aren’t smarter than me I can’t believe this, this is ridiculous I’m, going to Dr Hall and asking what this is

about. I went to [an elite boarding school], and I was like 'OK' and I just sat there and I wanted to hear what he really thought and he was like 'this is ridiculous, you're a plebe let's face it, you've come from shit and yano what are you even doing here you must have cheated to get that grade, to get a better grade than me'.

Within the above quotation, Robert's privately educated peer achieves a lower grade. "*I can't believe this, this is ridiculous*" Robert's peer comments and it is here that we observe the fear of failure that pervades the middle-class experience of education (Reay 2010). For the middle-classes educational failure, relative or otherwise is "intolerable, unwanted and belongs somewhere else [...]" educational failure remains firmly located within the working-classes" (Reay 2010: 341-342). As Robert's quote makes clear, rather than being recognised for his academic accomplishments Roberts's grades and status as a student at Stellar University are called into question and outright rejected on the basis of the perceived quality of his former education and as a result of Robert's status as a former and current social housing tenant. Robert's grades are rejected implicitly as a result of his prior education as suggested when Robert's classmate makes the comparison between the respective cost of their educations. Moreover, rather than being recognised as a legitimate learner his presence at the Stellar University is perceived to be the result of cheating, as Robert's classmate comments "*you've come from shit and yano what are you even doing here you must have cheated to get that grade*". Thus the suggestion here is that attendance at an elite university and academic success at an elite university is incompatible with coming from a social housing estate and being a recipient of social welfare as suggested through when Roberts's classmate states that he (Robert) has "*come*

from shit". Ben and Joes narratives that I present below add to, and inform, the difficult experience of being working-class, being a former and/or current recipient of welfare benefits and living on a council estate whilst also experiencing academic success at an elite university that I have been trying to convey:

Ben: I remember he showed me a skit on the Mitchell and Webb Look this comedy sketch program and there was one bit where they were taking the mick out of people from Harrow type schools and umm there was one bit where somebody said 'you eat like you get free school dinners' and they were saying it kinda mocking the rich and he thought they were saying it in a kind of mocking poor people and he showed it me and I was like 'I got free school meals' and he was like, 'Oh, ok.' I was like, I'm not on the same page as you...

Carli: What did he say when you said you were on free school meals?

Ben: He was gob smacked. Everyone here thinks it's impossible for being from that kind of background to end up here. It's not probable but it's not impossible. They just don't expect anyone on benefits, who had free school meals.

Within the above exchange Ben recalls how his university peer was "gob smacked" at the revelation that he was the recipient of free school meals – a key measure of 'poverty' within UK education. Being poor is perceived to be incompatible with attending the Stellar University by his middle-class peer.

Ben's discomfort when his peer mocks those who are poor is evidenced when he utters "*I was like, I'm not on the same page as you [...]*". It is here that we witness the mismatch between Ben's habitus and the field of the elite university. Ben's habitus formed within his working-class field of origin does not dispose him to, nor is compatible with a mocking of 'the poor' that is, as I demonstrate throughout this chapter central to everyday student life at the elite Stellar University. Interestingly, there is no evidence of Bourdieu's cleft habitus (Bourdieu 1999, 2000) or Ingram's habitus tug (2011) but instead an outright rejection of the economic hardship (thus a lack of economic capital) of others as a source of humour. As the quotations throughout this chapter make clear, central to the imaginaries of participants' middle-class peers was the perceived disjuncture between the locality, or rather, the field (to speak in Bourdieusian terms) which the participants are from (a vilified sink council estate) and the elite university that they now attend. As Ben recalls, "*they just don't expect anyone on benefits, who had free school meals*". There are parallels between participants' university peers' perceptions of them and political, popular and media portrayals of welfare recipients and social housing tenants that were circulating at the time and that continue to circulate. But that was not all, being perceived to be 'unintelligent' was not a phenomenon confined to those working-class participants who had received welfare or who lived in social housing but also extended to the working-class participants that embodied and expressed a working-class accent and way of speaking. Bourdieu (1986) has written about the way social class materializes and manifests itself through the body and as Skeggs argues "class is always coded through bodily dispositions: the body is the most ubiquitous signifier of class" (1997a: 82). Hey writes of the way in which accents carry "sediment and constantly reactivated meaning linking the demography of class to the geography of accents and their place in the hierarchy

of social positions” (Hey 1997: 140-141). They form part of one’s embodied class identity connoting intelligence, lack and a myriad of other cultural meanings (Lawler 1999; Sayer 2002; Skeggs 1997a; Southerton 2002). Addison and Mountford (2015: 1-2) have recently shed light upon the way in which “talking, including accent, local phrases, swearing and slang, is resurfacing as conductors of value in HE [...] and] how talking becomes a mechanism in which value is read off certain people”. Within the highly competitive and marketized contemporary higher education system both staff and students sought to (re)activate forms of distinction through accent and speak so as to fit in and play the game (Addison and Mountford 2015: 8) of academia and the graduate labour market. Playing the game took the form of adopting what were considered to be middle-class ways of speaking and modifying one’s local accent so as not to be read in negative ways and thus fit in. Within this study, accent was also central to the ways in which participants were perceived by their middle-class peers and by which they were situated as being in or out of place at Stellar University by their middle-class peers. Participants often spoke of the ways in which their use of spoken language, dialect and accent were not only mocked but resulted in their peers questioning their academic ability. Within the exchange between Joe and myself we witness the way in which embodying a working-class accent and coming from a council estate compounds his experience of Stellar University and importantly how it is understood by Joe as being a classist interaction. As Joe tells me:

Joe: [...] even in my first year or two I used to say stuff to people and they would just be like ‘how can YOU do math’s’ and I was like ‘well it’s not about that; and they would be like ‘ah you just sound so stupid’ and I’m like okay

thank you. I don't think it's been a barrier to me getting an education I just think it has been a barrier in interacting and working with certain types of people. Certain types of people won't take you seriously in group work if they know you are from a council estate. The guy I worked with in the first year of the degree he wouldn't listen to anything I would say.

Carli: *Just openly dismissive?*

Joe: *Yeh openly he'd just say well when you say it like than Joe and I'd be like what do you mean and he was like well you just sound stupid and I'd say well mathematically it works. He'd constantly call me common (pauses) he thought it was funny like it was something to jibe about. I was like common it's getting a bit old now. I was like you don't call that guy over there a racist word so why do you call me a classist word and he was like 'well yano it's not offensive is it'*

The above highlights the way in which language although a means of communication is read not only as a symbol of social status but as an indicator of belonging within the elite university for it carries connotations of intelligence and academic ability. Joe's accent positions him as being “*stupid*” and “*common*” and it is for this reason he struggles to have his academic contributions taken seriously within the field of the university. This was a common occurrence throughout my study. The working-class first-generation students of this study who sought not to downplay or outright conceal their working-class accents or speech perplexed their middle-class peers “*they just*

look at me confused when I speak” (Amy). Participants’ intellectual ability was continuously questioned and at times outright rejected by their peers as a result of their working-class accent and dialect: *“It’s like as soon as I open my mouth and speak my ability is questioned. They’re a bit like what you doing here and they don’t listen to what I have to contribute academically, I feel dismissed, written off”* (Lucy). For other participants, their accent operated as a marker of difference when among the middle-class field of the elite university which engendered feelings of non-belonging and isolation on campus. Callum, a local student tells me, reflecting on his time at the Stellar University:

Some guy asked if I was French cos I had a moustache and he didn’t recognise my accent and I was like it’s a local accent you’re in this city now even though there’s not many locals here.

Accent and language impacted profoundly upon the everyday lived experience of being a working-class first-generation student at Stellar University. Talking was a mechanism by which participants were situated as being in or out of place at Stellar University. As the comment from Callum illustrates, it was not uncommon for participants to evidence feelings of non-belonging as a result of sounding different. However, more often than not the politics of belonging at elite universities and issues of non-belonging were evoked when participants’ middle-class peers questioned their academic ability as a result of their embodied working-class accents. However, unlike the findings of Loveday (2015), Abrahams and Ingram (2013) and Addison and Mountford (2015) there was seldom any evidence of participants *intentionally* and *actively* adapting their

regional accents to ‘fit in’ with the linguistic expectation of the field. Why would they? As Gagnon notes, “adopting middle class mannerisms, ways of speaking and writing, ways of knowing and understanding, does not give a working class student access to the privileges and benefits that come with actually being middle class” (2018: 571). However, as I will discuss in the following chapter, elite higher education *did* bring about changes in participant’s accents and speech codes and the role of accent and language was discussed in ambiguous, ambivalent, contradictory and confusing ways throughout this study.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have explored the way in which the working-class, first-generation students of this study experienced the elite Stellar University and of the politics of belonging. I recognised the continual interplay between the classed, ethnic and gendered identities of participants whilst also paying attention to the way in which welfare, poverty and place compound participants’ experiences of Stellar University. Throughout this chapter I have argued that, taken together, the anecdotes that participants shared and the myriad others that did not make it into this thesis make one headline conclusion of this thesis clear – racism and classism on university prevails and shapes participants’ everyday experiences of attending an elite university in profound ways. Specifically, this chapter elucidates, and argues that, for the participants of this study classism and racism occurred, both implicitly and explicitly, at the micro and macro level and permeated participant’s everyday mundane interactions ranging from the social, the romantic and the academic. For example, the inclusion and perpetuation of negative stereotypes relating to class, ethnicity place and space within lectures and course readings; being mistaken for ‘locals’, trying to ‘crash’ student events;

and even being accused of lying about their student status in order to romantically impress others to give just three examples.

The increasing visibility of racism within UK universities is the result and outcome of impassioned student *and* staff whistle blowers (see Ferguson 2018 and Frazer-Carroll 2018 for an overview regarding the recent incident of Cambridge lecturer Priyamvada Gopal) rather than universities themselves. Classism, in contrast, remains largely omitted from collective campus social justice campaigns. Much debate and discussion *is* happening with regards to race and class on campus and sociological research needs to attend to this. Thus, I argue, given the centrality of racism and classism on campus, and of the way in which it pervades every facet of the student life I argue that sociological research needs to address the dearth of research that systematically explores and gives voice to the way in which racism and classism builds up and pervades the classroom, corridors, cafes and bars and of the emotional and educational costs of such experiences. Being called “*fucking common scum*” or being told by your peer that it is the first time that they have “*seen a black girl*” whether in jest or in all seriousness is an unnerving, unsettling experience that speaks to the wider politics of belonging within elite higher education; it is an experience that is worthy of sociological attention.

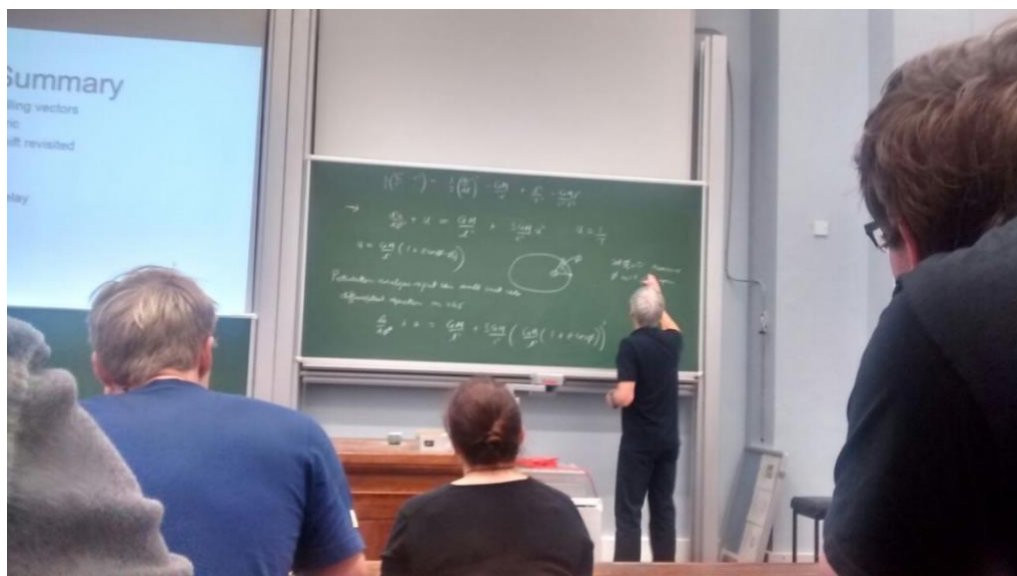
Chapter 4. Elite University Attendance and Changing Relations: Family, Friends and the Self

Introduction

Sitting in a café on campus drinking coffee and eating cake I conduct a photo elicitation interview with Daniel. Part way through our interview, we discuss a group coursework project that Daniel had been working on. Although Daniel was doing his best to convey his project in laymen terms, my brain was unable to grasp its premise. Feeling defeated, I sigh, and tell Daniel “*I wish I understood Science*”. Instantly, Daniel replies “*so that feeling you’ve got there, that’s the feeling I had in this lecture*”. In the below photo, Daniel is not just simply in a lecture, he is in a lecture that is “*hard [...and] intense*”. As Daniel tells, me “*there are a lot of times when I am sat in a lecture thinking, like, what is actually going on*”. Without prompt or probe, Daniel continues:

I took that picture because this is, whilst a lot of people think ‘oh yeh he is at uni he understands everything’ I don’t, like I don’t always get [name of science subject], like a lot of the time, in the lectures, most of the time I am thinking I don’t know if I will ever get this, last year I got that feeling a lot. I am not some genius that sits and thinks no I understand everything everyone says but I work hard and I get it eventually [...] I have to work hard to get it, to get the degree, but I will get it [...] My family like they see that I am doing well and they are like well he must understand this stuff, and I do understand it eventually but a

lot of work goes into it before actually understanding stuff and I just wish they understood that



At the heart of Daniel's narrative, a number of issues are at play. Daniel works hard at university, yet he is seldom able to escape feeling lost academically. At this same time, his family positions him as knowledgeable, as understanding his work, and as “*doing well*”. This is certainly not how Daniel feels; he works hard, tirelessly hard – and he just wishes that his family understood this – that he is “*not some genius*”. This is what I attend to in this chapter, along with the myriad nuanced ways in which participants experienced being a working-class, first-generation student at an elite university.

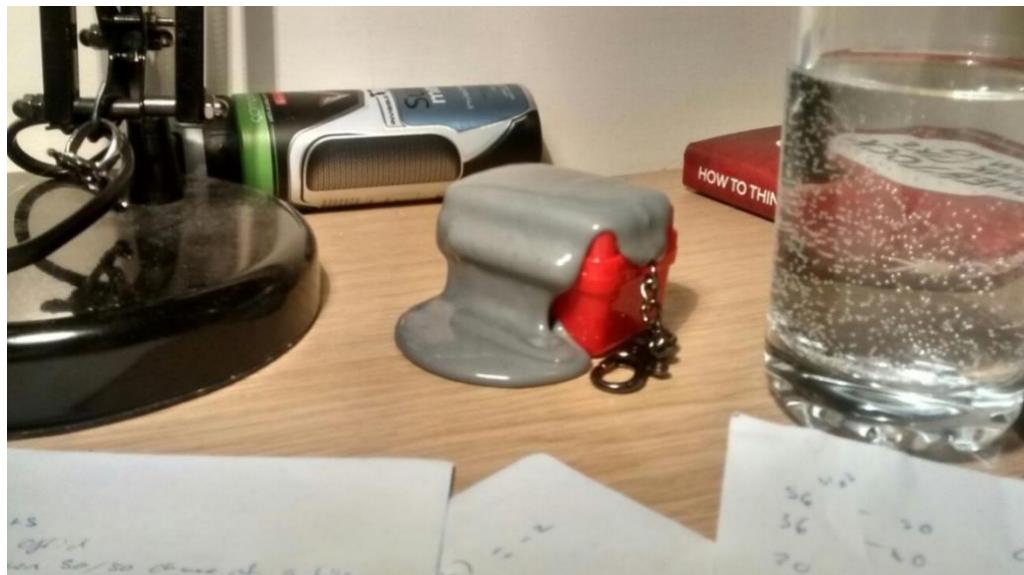
In chapter three I explored the experiences of working-class, first-generation students at the elite Stellar University, focusing on their experiences within and beyond the university campus. Acknowledging that much research pertaining to

working-class students at elite universities (and universities per se) have concentrated upon working-class students' 'on-campus experience'. there exists a limited, albeit illuminating body of research exploring the effects of university attendance upon working-class students' relationships with their home communities and friends (Baxter & Britton 2001; Lee and Kramer 2013). In seeking to contribute to this body of literature and in recognising that the effects of educational success for working-class persons are felt, to borrow a phrase from Ingram, both "within school and beyond the gate" (Ingram 2011), this chapter considers the effects of elite university attendance on participants' relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family. Data from this chapter derives largely from that generated through field notes, interviews, photo elicitation, walking interviews, driving interviews and participant observation.

I begin this chapter by considering the way in which participants seldom view academic work as equating to 'hard work', and the way in which this fuelled their perceived loss of connection to their 'non-academically mobile' working-class friends and family. This chapter then progresses to explore the way imposter syndrome, temporal constraints, the lack of economic capital and participants' acquirement of new cultural capital effects participants' relationships and connection(s) to their working-class 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family. In attending to participants' accounts, attention is given to the emotions that are aroused and of the reflexive, nuanced way in which participants themselves are *trying* to understand their experience of being a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu and Patterson 1979) as a result of their elite university attendance.

Intellectual Works not ‘Hard’ Working-Class Work

Within chapter three, I discussed the way in which participants were positioned by their middle-class counterparts at Stellar University as lacking academic ability. Conversely, however, when among their working-class ‘non-educationally mobile’ family and friends, they were at times positioned as ‘knowledgeable others’ and ‘experts’. There were parallels between the “scholarship boy discourse” (Gamsu 2017) and the notion that there exists “different types of minds” that Stellar University espoused (as discussed in chapter three) and how participants were perceived within their working-class field by their ‘working-class, non-educationally mobile’ family and friends. Some participants told me that it was not uncommon for their family and friends to ask them questions that both related to, and deviated from, their degree – and that they were expected know the answers owing to the fact that they were attending an elite university. “*Why is the sky the way it is*” and “*Why do we have seasons*” are just two examples. Similarly, it was not uncommon for participants to talk about how their families perceived them as *being different* intellectually – it is here that the “different type of mind” discourse was hinted at. No more evidently is this articulated than in a photo elicitation interview that I conducted with Daniel.



The above photo serves to “break the frame” (Harper 2002: 21) of his normal view allowing his activity to be seen from a new perspective (Harper 2002). Daniel's photo is a testament to Grady's (2004) argument that “pictures are valuable because they encode an enormous amount of information in a single representation” (2004: 20). There is much encoded within Daniel's photograph. Referring to the items in the photo, Daniel talks about his university work and his working habitus, among much else. At the centre of the photograph lay a small red keyring of a toolbox covered with ‘clever putty’, a widely commercially available toy based on silicone polymers that his aunt bought him for Christmas, as Daniel tells me:

A lot of my family like they think of me as the one who does science and stuff [...] I think a lot of my family do see me as like seeing the bigger picture, thinking about stuff. Like it's just that if something's complicated they like to give it to me [...] like there was a Rubik's Cube and they gave me that, I know that's not science but it's a puzzle. I didn't finish it, I spent like four hours trying to do it. [...]. My family like they see that I am doing well and they are like well he must understand this stuff, and I do understand it eventually but a lot of work goes into it before actually understanding stuff...

Daniel's comments are most interesting. The “different type of mind” discourse is implied when Daniel speaks of the way his family see him as the one who “*does the science stuff*”, who sees “*the bigger picture*” and who enjoys “*thinking about stuff*”. Specifically, such sentiments echo the Norwood Report (1943) when writing of the “different types of minds” and specifying the type of education one should receive, arguing that pupils who were “interested in learning for its own sake” would attend grammar school. Despite Daniel's family's perceptions of him “*doing well*” and “understand[ing]” his degree, Daniel is keen to inform me that this doesn't come naturally nor easily, but is the result of much hard work. The themes and issues raised through Daniel's photo elicitation interview was representative of participants' experience of being a student at the elite Stellar University. The notion that his family saw ease in his ability to intellectual grasp his subject matter for Daniel, as it was for the majority of participants, was actually the result of hard work and not the result of him being “a genius”. Hard work was central to participants' narratives when thinking about the way in which their elite university attendance had affected their relationships and connections with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends, family and wider working-class ‘culture’ – as I shall now discuss.

Throughout the fieldwork, whether in interviews, photo elicitation, or walking and driving tours, participants spoke about their relationships with their working-class social network when reflecting upon the effects of elite university. Participants often spoke about a threatened connection to the working-class culture of hard work and a strong work ethic. Many of the participants stressed that they could no longer identify with the core values of a working-class

identity, those that of “hard work” and a “strong work ethic” (Lucas 2011). As Jack, Jasmin and Katie tell me:

Jack: *We just do different types of work and I feel that I can't relate to what they do*

Jasmin: *So I enjoy what I do, I'm reward intrinsically which I feel none of my friends are so that is definitely a difference between us. When I am sat writing an essay, I am not forever looking at the clock thinking when can I stop this. You'd never hear me moan about work, that I hate it or can't wait for it to be done. I don't know, my friends, they do jobs they hate and it's just about getting through to the end of the day, end of the week. They work so hard, long hours for little pay and I just can't relate to it really.*

Katie: *One works in Sainsbury's, one works in Vodafone shop (slightly laughs) one works in a call centre half and half full and part time. They are not like skilled I guess, like you don't need qualifications for them. They applied and got in. It's hard work, long hours, minimum pay. They work really hard. It is just very different to what I do, I enjoy my work they don't. I feel like because of that difference I feel, like I don't know really (pauses) distant from them, like, (pauses) not the same*

As the above comments allude to, “hard work” and a strong work ethic is envisaged by the working-class participants of my study as being core to a

working-class identity. The theme of hard work is based upon the ideal of hard work. Here, participants' discussions omitted references to one enjoying work and instead focused upon the value placed on working hard. The notion that one should work hard every day regardless of enjoyment coupled with the necessity of working was central to what it meant to embody a working-class working culture for participants. Coupled with the notion of hard work was that of a strong work ethic which at the heart lay determination, dedication and effort. Interestingly, the occupations of participants' working-class family members and peers were referred to as 'jobs' as opposed to 'careers'. There was seldom any reference to one's work being a source of enjoyment or passion, and participants seldom spoke of intrinsic reward or virtue. For participants, "*hard work*", a central feature of a working-class culture, was akin to living, or rather existing: the notion of hard work and a strong work ethic was not motivated by a labour of love but instead the need to provide financially for oneself and the wider family, by financing accommodation, food and the like for example. This notion pervaded participants' narratives. It was perhaps for this reason as to why participants, on the whole, were reluctant to speak of academic work as equating to 'hard work' in the same way that their family and friends engaged in 'hard work'.

Participants' reluctance to envisage academic work as hard work arguably fuels their perceived alienation from a working-class culture and community. Rather than evoking the discourse of hard work, participants spoke of their relative luck and privilege in both implicit and explicit ways. Participants considered themselves to be 'lucky' and privileged (for a myriad of reasons) in comparison

to their 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family as a result of their educational success and elite university attendance.

Katie: I am so lucky to be here

*Amy: I don't know how I ended up here to be honest, yano most of my friends
are struggling*

*Jack: It's hard work but when I think what I could be doing... what... like
things could have been*

*Jane: I feel like whilst I have worked so hard to be here and I have, you know. I
stayed in I didn't go out, I sacrificed material things where I wasn't earning a
wage where everyone went from school to work I also feel exceptionally lucky,
Lucky because I shouldn't be here, statistically yano. But lucky that I am, I've
worked hard but I have also slipped through. My school chronically
underperformed but here I am I dunno it's hard to explain.*

Carli: What's hard?

*Jane: How it happened. What the reason is. I know I am here because I have
worked hard (pauses) however I am not here just because I have worked hard.*

If that was the case, then many more of my friends would be here too, I'm here because I was very lucky [...] I dunno it makes me feel a guilty a bit.

Feeling lucky is a theme well matched in literature on working-class educational success (Hey 2003; McGuire 2005; Reay 2001). As Mahony and Zmroczek argue, “[working-class] women who have gone through higher education often see themselves as being required to continue an ethic of service to others less ‘lucky’ than them” (Mahony & Zmroczek 1997: 5). Similarly, reflecting on her position within the academy, Reay writes of how “we academics, despite out incessant moaning about overwork and intolerable conditions, are in a luxurious situation compared to the growing ranks of the poor” (1997: 23-24).

Whilst it can be argued that participants' discourses espoused an understanding of a working-class culture as one that compromises of ‘hard work’ and a ‘strong work ethic’, it also alludes to the fact that such characteristics are the result of financial and social necessity and insecurity, as opposed to an innate passion for one’s work. This is suggested through participants' conceptualisation of such activities as ‘jobs’ and not ‘careers’, in addition to the acknowledgement that such activities are motivated by the need to provide housing, food and other resources essential to one’s livelihood. Participants' conceptualisation of the working-class culture of ‘hard work’ and a ‘strong work ethic’ was synonymous with that which characterised twentieth century labourism, while also encompassing the recognition of the erosion of its securities. Specifically, the proliferation of short-term, instable, zero-hour contracts with an unpredictable salary void of established routes of advancement, unionisation and labour securities in addition to a lack of solidaristic labour community characterised the

labour market experiences of participants' 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family.

Participants spoke of the working-class values of 'hard work' and a 'strong work ethic' in ways that romanticised the labour relations and lives of their working-class peers – often constructing them through the discourse of 'strivers' (Jensen 2014), whilst also alluding to the fact that much of what encompasses 'hard work' and a 'strong work ethic' was akin to that which characterises the lives of the British precariat (Standing 2009; MacDonald et al., 2012). Whilst low pay, instable zero-hour contracts, stagnating wages, a lack of progression (financially or otherwise) was interpreted as being central to the working-class experience of 'hard work' and 'working-hard', it was also a feature of working life that many of the participants themselves were actively trying to avoid. This in turn fuelled a sense of alienation from working-class culture, although this was not something that participants would overtly share with their 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family. Many participants spoke implicitly of being modest in their ambitions when among their 'non-educationally mobile' family and friends. Participants evidenced a conscious downplaying of their future hopes and desires:

Katie: Yeh, so people ask me what I want to go to university for and it's really hard. It's like treading a tight rope sometimes. I explain that I want to better myself and push myself to achieve and it's kinda like better yourself from what? Achieve what? So instead I just explain it by saying that I wasn't ready to stop learning. But even then it's a bit airy fairy.

Jane: Well I came to uni because (pauses) well obviously I am motivated to be the best I can be. I don't say that in a selfish competitive way [...] well I am

competitive, but only with myself... I just want to be the best I can be. I'm not sure what exactly I want to do yet but I know the possibilities or endless and I know university is a stepping stone to getting there but, like, I just want to do something more than but I kinda downplay that around my friends otherwise I just sound all (pauses) like a bit up myself (pauses) like I'm too sure and that.

Know what I mean?

Some participants alluded to the fact that they would outright omit that a motivating factor fuelling their elite university participation was the fact that they wished to move beyond a working-class occupation and the financial necessity and precariousness that often characterises said experiences when in conversation with their 'non-educationally mobile' friend and families. This was often framed through a discourse of 'progress' and 'progression' as opposed to more explicit articulations such as 'escaping', 'getting out', or 'getting away' that characterised the experience of the working-class women of Skeggs (1997), Lawler (1999) and Lucey et al., (2003) class mobility studies. Unlike the women in Skeggs (1997) study whom envisaged higher education as means to distinguish themselves from the working-classes, the working-class first-generation participants of this study did not wish to differentiate themselves in such a way as the exchange between myself and Jasmin illustrates:

Jasmin: I was really stressed, about my grades and how I was doing. I was at home at the Easter and trying to work on my essay. My mum just told me not to worry to just try my best. I said something like 'oh it's so hard to get a job' and she responded. Like well-intended that I would be able to get a job no problem and I kinda just said (pauses) I said 'yeh but a good job, with prospects and progression' and as soon as I said it I knew what I had done.

Carli: *What had you done?*

Jasmin: *Well, I kind of felt like by making the distinction of a 'good job' I was saying the jobs they do. That they weren't good enough and I dunno. That I was creating this idea that I was too good for the types of jobs that they weren't enough. The types my family do*

Carli: *I see, did your mum say anything?*

Jasmin: *No it just went silent.*

Here within the exchange between myself and Jasmin, we witness a “careful monitoring for presentations” (Skeggs 1997: 11). Jasmin speaks of her desire to not just secure a job *per se*, but a specific type of job: “*a good job, with prospects and progression*”. Highly reflexive, Jasmin recognises the way in which she unintentionally distinguished between the type of job her family does and that which she wishes to pursue upon graduating from Stellar University. As Jasmin tells me: “*as soon as I said it I knew what I had done*”. Here we witness Jasmin’s failure to monitor her presentation and her subsequent realisation that she had distinguished herself from her family, that she had 'let slip' that attending Stellar University was about *not* following in the footsteps of her family, *not* pursuing a similar trajectory and *not* getting the type of job that her family had. Whilst Jasmin is not concerned with dis-identification (Skeggs 1997), she nonetheless dis-identifies from her working-class family. Jasmin draws upon her

institutionalised cultural capital by way of her attendance at the elite Stellar University to distinguish herself from the jobs that her ‘non-educationally mobile’ family and friends do and that which she wishes to pursue; albeit in an accidental way. A slip of the tongue and a slip in her monitoring; It is here that Jasmin hints at her desire for more, which, as much previous research has highlighted, is an experience with marked by emotions, not all, always positive. As Lucey et al. (2003) write:

Wanting something different, something more than your parents, not only implies that there is something wrong with your parents’ life, but that there is something wrong with them. This kind of dis-identification with one’s parents and family can engender a deep sense of shame –itself so shameful that it must be psychically regulated through repressive mechanisms.

It is important to note that Jasmin's family were exceptionally supportive of her decision to study at Stellar University and were proud of all that she had achieved and what lay ahead. However, the “difficulties of negotiating the emotions, negative as well as positive, that are aroused when aspiration and success mean becoming and being profoundly different to your family and peer group” (Lucey et al., 2003: 286) were present even among working-class families who are supportive of participants' educational success. Nicola Ingram encapsulates this phenomenon in a way that is most moving. Reflecting upon her experience of being a working-class child in Northern Ireland, attending a grammar school and the subsequent experience of “sadly being pulled away from my working-class culture through becoming educationally successful” Ingram writes:

I remember all too painfully how I had to write my school notes myself because my mother couldn't spell, nor construct grammatically correct sentences, and also used a curious and random mix of capitals and lowercase letters. She was embarrassed by her poor literacy and asked me to write the notes. More importantly, she impressed on me the value of a good education. "Don't be like me", she would say, and those words would stab at my heart because I knew that she meant more than just getting educational qualification. She wanted my life to not be hers, not simply to be better than hers. There is something very dark about a parent telling their child that their life and their way of being are not to be valued. The vast majority of educated people will never know how that feel-the heart-wrenching sorrow of being ripped and torn.

(Ingram 2018: 2)

Whilst participants recognised differences between the lives of their working-class friends and family and that which they desired, only a small minority of participants directly stated that they did not value the trajectories and occupations or their working-class friends and family. Instead, participants' desires to pursue occupations that can be referred to as being 'white collar' were motivated by their desires to achieve financial security. Here, financial security was not the desire to acquire an abundance of material, consumerist possessions, but instead manifested itself in participants' desires to achieve middle-class economic comfort. To own a home, to be able to meet monthly household bills without adverse financial strain and possess ample economic capital and a disposable income for themselves and their future family. As Lewis, Sophie and Priya shared:

Lewis: *I'm here at university because I don't want to have to struggle like my mum did with me and my brother growing up.*

Sophie: *Provide a life that I never had.*

Priya: *I want to own my own home, be able to provide adequately for my future family and just not have to struggle and count the pennies. Growing up money was so tight, there was there anything spare and a degree is a way out of that.*

Thus, for the working-class first-generation students of this study, university attendance was seldom the result of a desire to engage in the project of the self. Nor was it ever envisaged as a rite of passage – despite the massification, marketisation and commodification of higher education. Participants were clear from the outset that they did not believe that acquiring a university degree (from an elite university or otherwise) did not mean that they were of superior morality than those who had not acquired such an education. Here we witness participants' rejection of the neoliberal discourse that asserts a university degree as being a prerequisite for 'success' and as being the 'correct' choice to make (Burke 2012; Taylor 2012; Burke and Jackson 2007). For the working-class first-generation participants, humility was to be found in all paid work and not solely those that required a university degree. Despite this however, participants' elite university attendance served to open up the ground between them and their 'non-

educationally mobile' friends and family in ways I shall now elucidate and discuss.

The Loss of Connection to a Working-Class Social Network

The following extract is from one interview with Jessica, a white, working-class girl from Essex. It exemplifies some of the psychosocial losses involved in being working-class and educationally successful, and of the pain and estrangement endured as the result of unsuccessfully being able to maintain a highly valued working-class social network:

Jessica: Exam times I stayed in more and went out less of course, but I dunno, everything was fine with my friends [...] Then second year things go more serious with college, I was always serious but like I got into my first choice of uni and I was ecstatic, over the moon, couldn't believe it and that's when I knew what I had to do. I had to sit and study and study and study and over study and make sure that I did everything I could to achieve my grade requirements for Stellar University. I think that's what did it. I wasn't going out as much, I couldn't (pause) I didn't have the time [...] something happened that summer and a core group of my friends just went all weird on me [...]

Carli: Oh right

Jessica: I'd proper put myself out there [...] But I would just be out with them and it would just be so awkward... Like, I didn't understand what I'd done wrong. It's a shame [...] like I sound like a twat for saying this (pause) but sod

it I'm going to say it anyway (pauses) I felt as if they were a bit jealous, like that's why all that weird stuff happened [...] my mates worked in shops, and as beauticians and that and when the boys got to me [...] they guess hairdresser cos I always had long hair with extensions but then I'd correct them, politely.... Tell them I was at going uni and I dunno, they [boys] would all be like 'ahh that's well good' because not a lot of girls went uni from my way and I don't think my mates liked it. The positive praise and attention. That makes me sound like a twat but yano [...]

The above narrative captures a number of issues at play when thinking about what it means to being working-class and educationally successful. It illuminates many of the reasons as to why participants of this study found that elite university attendance was accompanied by the loss of connections to a working-class social network and community. Differing priorities, a lack of shared experiences and interests, temporal constraints and what can only be described of as a mixture of jealousy and envy characterised many participants' experiences of elite university attendance – as has been highlighted in previous sociological work exploring working-class academic success (Lucey et al., 2003). Throughout the interviews, photo elicitation and walking and driving tours that I conducted, participants often spoke about the importance of their home locales that they felt a deep-seated connection to. As Ingram (2009: 442) argues “in many cases having a working-class identity cannot be separated from belonging to a working-class locality... [and] for many working-class children, life is lived mostly within their neighbourhood and it therefore becomes a strong force in identity formation” – a finding evident throughout this studies data.

Participants' locales and communities were of significant importance to them and they often stressed the significance of friendship and kinship ties when reflecting upon 'home'. Participants shared their experiences of growing up that were characterised by close connections, they often presented themselves as being totally immersed in their working-class communities. It was not uncommon for participants to state that their friends were more like family than people that they 'just knew' and 'lived alongside'. It is in this vein that participants' narratives somewhat evoked a nostalgia for 'tight-knit neighbourhood community.

To echo Allen et al. (2014: 3) a "time past" is characterised by working class solidarity, care and more communal forms of living". Participants told stories of popping into one another's homes after school, for dinner, 'to chill', or to simply sit and watch TV or spend whole weekends. Importantly, for the participants of this study, 'home' referred not only to the geographical and spatial location where they dwelled prior to university, but also friendship ties with those from their home locales in addition to those who they had 'gone to school with'. Throughout the various interviews conducted, it was evident that participants placed a high value upon the social networks that characterised their time prior to university. It is to no surprise that, for the majority of participants of this study, remaining close to those that they had grown up with was of upmost importance. This was evoked by the language of participants who spoke of the importance of "*staying in contact*", "*making the effort*" and "*not forgetting friends at home*". Often such friendships were framed through discourses of 'strength' and 'ease'. The notion that it didn't matter how long you can go without seeing or talking to one another when you get together as 'it's always the

same' pervaded participants' narratives. No matter how long it had been, as Jessica told me, *"it's like you were round just the day before"*.

Participants described the effortless nature of their friendships with their 'non-educationally mobile' peers from home, often telling me that "it doesn't matter what you do", that they could *"just pop in whenever"*, and that *"being in one another's home is like being in your own"*. However, within participants' discourses, we can glimpse a level of contradiction and ambivalence. It was apparent that whilst the working-class first-generation students of this study highly valued their working-class social network and communities, maintaining and upholding said relationships was not a straightforward and unproblematic experience. Many friendships and indeed kindships were strained as a result of participants' elite university attendance, whereas others outright waned. As Rebecca said: *"it's not the same anymore, we are less close, we've grown apart"*. Participants were explicit in the fact that elite university attendance had often resulted in a loss of a working-class social network and had fractured their ties to friends and family – and in many cases aware of why this was as I shall now discuss.

The Role of Imposter Syndrome, Time Poverty and a Lack of Economic Capital

Whilst the loss of connections to a working-class social network and community was undeniably the result of an amalgamation of factors in an overwhelming number of interview transcripts, feelings of a) imposterism b) temporal

constraints alongside c) participants' lack of economic capital were evidenced as factors fuelling the breakdown of friendships – as I shall now discuss.

Imposterism



During a photo elicitation interview, in elucidating the meanings, memories and moments behind the above picture that was specifically taken for this study, Daniel tells me:

“This room was just always empty every time I went in there [...] I sent this picture to my lab partner because he is always talking about me working hard and I was like me working hard early again [...] I took it to show that I was working when no one else was, I kind of like that feeling [...] I like to remind myself that I am actually working hard because sometimes when you think everything’s a bit much you think ‘could I be doing more?’ [...] whenever I do

my work, I always think I could have answered that better [...] it leaves me feeling like I won't have done very well [...] I have been doing alright but I don't like to tell myself that because [long pause] I'm worried I will slip up."

(Daniel)

At the heart of Daniel's quote, I argue, are the hallmarks of imposter syndrome. The feeling of insecurity, the refusal to envisage 'success' as something that's legitimate and the result of one's competence: "*Could I be doing more*", "*Could I have answered that better*", "*I have been doing alright but I don't like to tell myself that*" and "*I'm worried I will slip up*" are classic symptoms, I argue, of feeling like an imposter within academia. Despite the fact that Daniel is doing well academically at Stellar University, very well indeed, he evidences a "fear of being unmasked, not only as incompetent but as a fraud as well" (Breeze 2018: 194-195) when he speaks of not doing enough, nor answering sufficiently.

For Daniel, small academic success at Stellar University can't be celebrated, he daren't. After all, it's just a matter of time until he "*slip[s] up*". As Breeze recently argued, 'imposter syndrome' conveys not only an inability to recognize one's own success and internalize esteem indicators but a conviction of fraudulence and inauthenticity" (2018:194). These aforementioned conundrums and woes are archetypal of imposter syndrome and archetypal of the thoughts and feelings that pervaded the experience of many of the working-class, first-generations students at Stellar University who were at the heart of this study. Within the comments of Amy, Jack and Priya, imposterism is evidenced in a

way so blatant it appeared to leap off the pages of transcripts – yet it is seldom articulated through the explicit language of imposterism:

Amy: There is just not the time, not the money, we just don't do the same things anymore. I just need to study as much as I can to try and get the best grade I can... They (parents and working-class, 'non-educationally mobile friends') don't always understand that, they think it just comes naturally...

Jack: I just need to work, just because I got the grade last time doesn't mean to say I will get it next time.

Priya: I always feel that the grades I get are flukes. Nothing's ever guaranteed so I just need to study and my friends don't always understand that. It's not easy.

Imposter syndrome and feelings of fraudulence, whilst common in higher education, have been historically understood as an individualised personal problem. A personal trouble as opposed to a public issue. As Breeze notes, imposterism with its psychological roots (Clance and Imes 1978; Clance 1985) refers to:

“Feelings of not belonging, of out-of-place-ness, and the conviction that one's competence, success, and likeability are fundamentally fraudulent, that it is

only a matter of time before this is discovered, before being found out [...] imposterism implies underlying feelings of inadequacy and deficiency, but also conveys a particular felt-as inauthentic or fraudulent relationship to indicators of belonging and achievement” (Breeze 2018:194-195).

Notions of academic fraudulence, of not being ‘good enough’ and feeling like an imposter have long characterised the experiences of those deemed ‘non-traditional’ (Breeze 2018; Gagnon 2017; Skeggs 1997b) within higher education. As McIntosh has argued:

The more hierarchical the activity or institution, and the higher up we go in it, the greater our feelings of fraudulence are likely to be. People feel fraudulent especially when ascending in hierarchies in which by societal definition they do not belong at the top of the pyramid... And so when we rise up in hierarchical worlds, while socialized to feel that we shouldn’t be there, it is not surprising if we appear to ourselves to be fraudulent (McIntosh 1985: 3)

In an era whereby UK higher education is marked by precarity, casualization and the increasing significance of “technologies of audit” (Sparkes 2007:527), new academic insecurities are elicited, fostered and given the perfect environment in which they are able to flourish (Gill and Donaghue 2016; Loveday 2018, McLean 2016; Nash 2018). Of the myriad “hidden injuries of the neoliberal university” (Gill 2010), academics have written of the prevalence and all pervasive nature of imposterism – highlighting the way that feeling like a fraud

permeates every aspect of academic culture and presents itself at all levels of the academic hierarchy (Clarke 2014; Gill 2010; Loveday 2017; Sparkes 2007). As a consequence, the ‘neurotic academic’ emerges. As Loveday conceptualizes “the ‘neurotic academic’ is an entrepreneurial figure governed through anxiety, but one who is also incited to then take responsibility for the self-management of those anxieties” (Loveday 2018: 162).

Recently however, in line with, and in resistance to, the increasingly neoliberal socio-political context in which higher education now operates, there has been calls (by feminist academics) to re-think imposter syndrome as a public feeling (Cvetkovich 2007, 2012 Breeze 2018). There exists the desire (within feminist academia) to move away from individualistic discourse and the conceptualisation of academic “privatized anxieties that are understood to reflect on the value and worth of the individual, rather than the values of the institutions that make intolerable demands” (Gill 2010:237) to an understanding of said issue(s) as a public and collective problem that is symptomatic and reflective of the wider social structure – specifically the neoliberal university and neoliberal life per se.

Feminist academics are troubling the binary distinction between one's ‘public’ work life and their ‘private’ emotional life (Hoshchild 1983), calling out and calling into question the “toxic impossibilities” (Pereira 2016:106) of neoliberal academic life and the “values of the institutions that make intolerable demands” Gill (2010:237) – rethinking imposterism as a social, political and public (Breeze 2018). Whilst this growing body of work is highly insightful, illuminating the

pressures and pulls of everyday academic life however mundane or extraordinary within the neoliberal university, it nevertheless focuses upon *and* derives largely from the reflections, perspectives and sentiments of academics, aspiring, established or otherwise (Breeze 2018; Gill and Donaghue 2016; Loveday 2018; Pereira 2016). Much less attention has been accorded to elucidating how ‘the neoliberal university’ and neoliberalism per se plays out in the lives of, and compounds working-class, first-generation students experiences of studying at an elite university – a theme and findings that were, somewhat unexpectedly, so stark within my data.

It is in this vein that I wish to contribute to the collective endeavour of casting light upon, and challenging, the contemporary pressures of university life by paying attention to the way in which neoliberal landscape of higher education *and* the graduate labour market (discussed below) played out within the lives of the working-class, first-generation participants of this study. Specifically, I focus upon the ways in which imposterism served as a barrier to participants from upholding their connections to their working-class social network and community as they worked tirelessly. After all, as Loveday argues “the negative affects circulating in HE institutions have the capacity to attach themselves to particular bodies more easily than others” (2016:1142 cited in Breeze 2018).

Temporal and Economic Constraints

In addition to feelings of imposterism and fraudulence, the heavily congested graduate labour market further precluded participants from maintaining relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and family – as Jack

and Lucy's narratives allude to:

Jack: It is so competitive; I can't afford internships so I need to stand out in an academic sense.

Lucy: So many people go to university now I need my classification to be the best it possibly can.

Whilst my findings highlighted the ways in which working-class students feel under pressure to 'perform' throughout their time at University, this was a finding that was intensified by the current landscape of higher education and the graduate labour market: one of opportunity but also of trap. In the contemporary era, there exists a surplus of graduates, too few graduate jobs and a 'global war' for graduates owing to increasingly globalizing labour markets (Brown 2003; Brown and Hesketh 2004; Brown and Tannock 2009; Brown et al., 2011).

Brown (2003) coins the term 'opportunity trap' to conceptualise the phenomenon whereby individuals are required to succeed in terms of acquiring academic credentials whilst at the same time the global labour market cannot provide enough jobs that match individuals' skill sets. Brown argues that we are in a period of 'educational stagflation', and that "as opportunities for education increase, they are proving harder to cash in" (Brown 2003: 149–50). Throughout fieldwork, participants demonstrated an awareness of credential inflation and the highly congested graduate global labour market that lay ahead. Participants

continuously spoke of the need to “*stand out from the crowd*”. In the current graduate labor market as Brown and Hesketh (2004) note, ‘standing out from the crowd’ within the discourse of graduate employability has shifted from cognitive and academic ability to non-credential abilities and successes such as behavioural competence and performative ability, a shift that participants were well-aware of.

As a result, a degree is no longer enough (Tomlinson 2008), and securing graduate employment is increasingly dependent upon one’s ability to capitalise upon attendance within higher education by ‘knowing’ and ‘playing the game’ (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Bourdieu 1990, 1986;) through the mobilisation and acquisition of cultural, economic and social capital so as to secure positional advantage (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Tomlinson 2008). Whilst research demonstrates students are aware of the increasing need to graduate with more than ‘just a degree’, students’ ability and capacity to do so is largely structured along class lines, with “middle-class advantage over privileged access to valued capitals... and the accrual of capital in the lives of working-class and middle-class students, compounds rather than alleviates social inequalities” (Bathmaker et al., 2013: 273).

Although this study was not comparative, its findings nevertheless echo previous research that highlights the barriers preventing working-class students from acquiring and mobilising various capitals so as to ensure their positional advantage (Lehmann 2012; Bathmaker et al., 2013). Due to participants’ lack of social, cultural and economic capital in addition to their time poverty – and thus

the absence of the required resources to arrange a work placement, engage in extracurricular activities or finance an overseas experience – ‘standing out from the crowd’ thus manifested itself through participants achieving the highest degree classification possible. Participants' focus upon academic *par excellence* was a strategy in response to their lack of capitals and inability to achieve positional advantage, rather than them not recognising the shift in ‘the rules of the university game’ (as was the case with the working-class students of Bathmaker et al.’s (2013) study). However, this was not without cost. Striving for academic excellence in the form of grade metrics placed a great deal of pressure upon the working-class first-generation students of this study, which served to preclude them from upholding their connections to their working-class social network and community. They needed to work and they simply had no time for anything else.

In an overwhelming number of interview transcripts, the breakdown of the connection to a working-class social network and community was the result of a time poverty. It was clear from the outset of fieldwork, when seeking to arrange initial meetings and follow up interviews, that time poverty characterised participants' experience of university. Time poverty was often the result of having to balance academic study with part time jobs and/or insisting that any spare time be spent studying, owing to feelings of imposterism alongside pressures to perform academically. Many participants shared with me that they were required to work part time in order to cover university living expenses owing to the low levels of financial support available to students from low income backgrounds – a finding matched within existing British research (Richardson et al., 2009; Hall 2010).

As research demonstrates, whilst the number of undergraduate students undertaking part time paid work during term-time has proliferated (Hovdhaugen 2015; Moreau and Leathwood 2006), students from working-class backgrounds remain more likely to undertake paid term-time work than their middle-class counterparts (Sanchez-Gelabert et al., 2017; Roska 2011; Callender and Wilkinson 2003) – especially women from working-class backgrounds (Callender and Kemp 2000). For the participants of this study who lived locally or who were parents themselves, time poverty was further exacerbated by their various caring, domestic and family commitments. Given the pressure felt by participants to perform academically, coupled with their need to undertake paid work, participants were left with minimal time to socialise both in and out of term time. It therefore followed that attendance at elite university resulted in a balancing act between the academic demands of Stellar University, the demands that they placed upon themselves, and maintaining social connections that had come before attendance at Stellar University. However, a distinct lack of time prevented participants from ‘keeping up with’ and thus socialising with their working-class social network and communities. Consequently, said networks waned. The quotes from Jasmin and Ben highlight this well:

Jasmin: At the end of the day, I am paying £9,000 to be here, that's £27,000 just on fees. It's an insane amount of money and it scares me to death that I have borrowed it. Because of that, I promised myself that I would go to the best university that I possibly could and that I would always put my university studies first... When I am home I don't always have the time [...] Like at

Easter I was busy with my dissertation and exam revision and a few hours working. I've taken out £30k, £40k debt, the graduate job market is intense. I can't afford to not graduate with a decent grade. I can't afford not to stand out from the crowd. I just don't have as much time as I used to. I just can't see them as much.

Ben: I've just been so busy; you must know how it is?, I'm sure they think 'oh here he goes again, exams, exams, study, study'. I'm sure they think 'ah there's Ben again, with his exams and his uni too busy to come to the pub for a quick one'. I've just got to get the best grade I can.

In addition to a lack of time, participants also shared with me the way in which a lack of economic capital often prevented them from socialising with their 'non-educationally mobile' working-class peers when at home. Lucy talked about this with me and the impact it had upon her ability to maintain friendships and connections to those she grew up with:

Lucy: A lot of my friends, a lot of the people I grew up with left school and went straight out to work. They were working, full-time earning, full-time money. Minimum wage money but still full-time money. I couldn't keep up with it. I worked 12 hours a week in a clothes shop and I just didn't have the same amount of money to spend going out.

Within the above quotes, we witness the way in which a lack of economic capital prevented her from socialising with her ‘non-educationally mobile’ working-class peers. Her lack of economic capital stemmed from the fact that she simply did not have the time to work more shifts as she was required to study. As a result, she could not “*keep up with*” her peers. This, is most interesting, as much has been written of the way in which a lack of economic capital can prevent working-class students from fully partaking in university social life and of the subsequent alienation felt as a result (Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Walpole 2003). However, the way in which a lack of economic capital can also prevent working-class students from socialising within their home communities is an issue seldom explored in higher education research to date. At the heart of participants' narratives and throughout the above quotes, we witness the prioritisation of academic work above all else. This is further evidenced, when, in a photo elicitation interview, Daisha tells me in relation to a photo taken from her bedroom window:

Daisha: *I was sat at my desk looking out the window, I just notice them road boys just chilling, when I was in the middle of all my work just thinking I wish I could just chill, I can't wait to chill...*

A lack of time as a result of prioritising one's academic work was a common theme across participants' narratives, and one matched in existing research (Reay et al., 2009). As the data reveals, prioritisation of academic work often meant that participants were precluded from socialising with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ working-class friends, family and communities. They simply did not

have the time, the economic capital or, more often than not, a mix of the two. This contrasts with the working-class students studying at the elite university of Reay et al.'s (2009) study, who on their own accord, early on in their educational careers, avoided those not on a trajectory of educational success, as Reay et al. write (2009: 1007):

Putting academic success first for these students often entailed avoiding those groups in school that were perceived to be less committed to learning, and where such groups constituted the majority in their schools, students described experiences of exclusion, sometimes self-imposed, from mainstream peer groups.

The Acquisition of New Cultural Capital

For others, a loss of a working-class social network was the result of participants not being able to (and at times) not wanting to socialise in the same way as their peers. Whilst this derived at times from participants' lack of economic capital as discussed above, this was also the result of the emergence of different priorities, subsequent life experiences, and what can be understood as the acquisition of new forms of cultural capital more aligned with the middle-classes. The comments of Priya and Aron are illustrative:

Priya: Well, some of my biggest worries include what grade I will get on an essay and securing work experience for the summer whereas my friends have children and it's just different priorities and that (pauses) so I guess that one reason why we don't talk as much as we used to.

Aron: *Like, they are struggling for money and yeh I do struggle but it's different, I'm trying to maximize my pound so I can do as much as I possibly can in the summer whereas my pals at home well it's about meeting the basic standard of living.*

Unquestioned in contemporary social and political rhetoric is the notion that social mobility is as unequivocally progressive force and that social mobility through formal education is a desired outcome of social improvement (Friedman 2014; Reay 2013). At this same time, within the UK, there is the implicit assumption among discourses of social mobility that a working-class position and a working-class culture is something that is 'bad', to be escaped and left behind (Reay 2013; Skeggs, 2004; Tyler 2013). However, throughout this study, participants evidenced an ambivalent experience of mobility; their experience of social mobility was characterised by a sense of dislocation but also a sense of becoming – of pleasure as well as pain, and of possibility and gain but also of great loss. Central to participants' narratives was a break away and detachment from class-inflected cultural practices and identities bought about by their elite university attendance. This was both explicitly articulated and implicitly implied. It is in this vein that this chapter now turns to discuss the changes brought about by elite university participation and the implications of this upon their relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family.

Cassie: *Since being here (Stellar University), I have just go this new-found desire to get out there and explore the world, meet new people, see new things,*

new countries, customs and histories. Like this summer I would like to go inter-railing around Europe. But it's not even that, even at weekends I like to do different things than before. I would rather take a long walk and visit an exhibition than go shopping or waste time watching TV and I don't know (pauses) I don't know really my friends from back home can't understand.

As the quote from Cassie alludes to, attendance at elite university resulted in the acquisition of new forms of cultural capital, and this was the case for many participants. This was most notably expressed in relation to participants' interests, pursuits and leisure activities. Cassie illustrates her desire to embark on a voyage of inter-railing, visiting various sites and cities in Europe, envisaging it as an opportunity to meet new people and learn about “*new countries, customs and histories*”. Such experience is one that “*friends from back home can't understand*”, thus suggesting the waning of previously taken for granted connections. Similarly, Lucy spoke of the possibility of undertaking a study year abroad, an experience that her ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends couldn’t understand owing to the fact that it meant delaying a graduate income, as she told me:

Lucy: So I was thinking about doing a year abroad and I mentioned it to my friend over the break but they couldn't understand why I would do that. My friends don't understand it cos it means not earning money for another year. Delaying a grad job for another 12 months. But it's more than money, it's an experience I won't ever get again.

The choice between seeking education overseas or remaining at university to finish one's degree is not so stark in middle-class families where embarking on a study abroad is often regarded as a rite of passage and a youthful sabbatical (Walters and Brooks 2010, Walters et al., 2011) and increasingly a way to achieve distinction in education (Bourdieu 1984; Brown 1995). Whereas, in contrast, working-class students who attend university are motivated by a "desire for the material benefits increased credentialism brings" (Reay 2001: 336), and so overseas study as part of their university education does not feature so prominently.

Whilst these positions are not mutually exclusive, this study nonetheless found that participants who did engage in extracurricular activities or pursued study abroad often received negative or indifferent reactions from their 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family,' as Dean recalled: "*they were just like 'why' when I told them I was going to France for the year*". Furthermore, participants spoke of the way in which their attendance at Stellar University had honed their interest in and confidence when discussing current political, social and economic domestic and international affairs. Participants often spoke of how they felt that they now possessed a "*greater awareness*" about the world in which they lived in as a result of their time at Stellar University:

Cassie: *I have definitely taken more of an interest in the world around me since being at university, I have more of an understanding of global current affairs. I have more of a desire to want to know about it.*

Katie: *I am just more aware of the world around me. Like, for example, how what I do within the home contributes to global warming, the importance of the EU and human rights and just things before I paid little attention or gave little thought to.*

A few of the participants, when thinking about the way in which university attendance has impacted both positively and negatively upon their relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and family, spoke of how university had broadened their minds and horizons. Lucy speaks of how, prior to university, she was “*really closed*” – both in relation to her thinking and how she spent her free time. The quote from Ben along with the exchange between Lucy and myself illuminates this aspect of the working-class first-generation of elite university attendance:

Ben: *It’s just broadened my mind; I consider things I would never have done before.*

Lucy: *Yeh, I think I’ve changed I don’t really know how... I think when I was back home I was really closed.*

Carli: *Closed how?*

Lucy: *Just close in like my opinions like, cos, I never thought oh I'll watch the news or that I'd be interest in politics or anything and now I'm like every morning I'll read the news when I wake up. And before at home I'd be just happy not doing anything in the evenings. I would go home and just watch films and now I'd rather go and do things, more productive. Like, my friends are so happy doing what they are doing staying at home don't want to move out whereas I am like I want to move out I want to do a year abroad.*

When reflecting upon the way(s) in which attendance at Stellar University has changed them, participants also spoke of their newly acquired desire to watch current affairs and philosophical debate programs such as: Question Time, Prime Minister's Questions, Sunday Morning Politics and The Big Questions, and how they now listen to “BBC 5 live, Radio 4 and not Kiss 100, Capital FM and that on the way to uni and when just driving around” (Lucy). Similarly, participants also spoke of the way in which they acquired a desire and passion for engaging in political, moral, ethical and religious debates as opposed to what one participant explicitly referred to as “*mundane chit chat*” and another as “*nonsense*” within their working-class social milieu. In some instances, the acquisition of new and middle-class forms of cultural capital through attendance at Stellar University had significant effects upon their relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ family from their home communities and locales. Often participants reported that there was “*simply not that much to talk about*” (Jasmin) as a result of said changes. The exchange between Lucy and myself exploring the way in which she feels she has changed since attending Stellar University illustrates this well:

Lucy: *Um, yeh, I think so. It sounds really silly, but just, like, conversations are more, like, I dunno back home you just like sit and chat nonsense, no one has any... they don't have any direction there no like political debate or like yano talking about the news or whatever, I dunno we just chat about random stuff.*

Whereas at uni they are more like... informative, more educational.

Carli: *When you are back home with your friends do you try and initiate any conversation with your friends about the news or whatever?*

Lucy: *Yeh, but it's like not even worth it cos like I just say something about like... oh like about something in the news, I'd say have you seen like anything in the news like the shootings in Paris and they are like no... I saw that some people have changed their profiled photos on Facebook and, like, they dunno what happened I'm just like how do you not know... It's all in the news I read the news every day and they're like nah don't watch the news.*

Here, within Lucy's narrative, not only do we witness the misalignment between Lucy's newly developed habitus and the working-class field which she finds herself in, but we also witness glimpses of feelings of superiority as her remarks “*it's like not even worth it cos*”; “*I'm just like how do you not know*”; and “*back home you just like sit and chat nonsense, no one has any... they don't have any direction*” suggest. Unlike some of the participants of Baxter and Brittons (2001) study, Lucy does not explicitly speak of herself as being superior to her ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and those that she shared a former (working-class) habitus, rather it is implicitly implied as the above comments elucidate. The

notion of superiority was a complex theme present within the findings of this study. Unlike the women of Skeggs (1997) study, participants did not actively seek to dis-identify from a working-class position through education. Instead, dis-identification was an inevitable consequence and outcome of their elite university attendance. The exchange between Lucy and myself continues:

Carli: *What sort of things do you talk to your friends at home about then?*

Lucy: *Just general things like what everyone at home is doing, what other people are doing around us. Tedious stuff whereas at uni were talking about the news.*

Interestingly, although perhaps unsurprisingly, whilst Lucy yearns to engage discussion pertaining to current affairs when among a working-class field, when she does so among her university peers in a middle-class field she feels as if she does not know enough. In her quotation below she alludes to feelings of fraudulence, of not knowing enough:

Carli: *Do you enjoy the conversation that you have with your friends?*

Lucy: *Sometimes, but other times I feel like that I am not as educated as they are in some kind of things. So like, cos like I've been just so used to being at home so I don't like talk about politics and stuff like if I tried to talk about politics back home and stuff. I remember when the elections were coming up*

and my friends were just like who's the Prime Minister at the moment and it's like just come on you should know who the Prime Minister is now. And it's like you say what party you voting for they're like dunno. Whereas like at uni they are all just chatting about it having debates and stuff.

Carli: *Whenever you have had to try and have those conversations at home what's happened?*

Lucy: *I just think they just like they either don't know or they say something like urgh [...] like once someone started talking the other day talking about like Labour but as if David Cameron was like Ed Miliband in the elections.*

Like they had just got it completely wrong.

Within the above exchange we witness a further expression of Lucy's feelings of superiority when she recounts her experience of discussing politics with her 'non-educationally' mobile working-class peers – drawing attention to the fact that they “*had just got it completely wrong*”. Additionally, and importantly, breaking away from notions of ‘superiority’ in the above exchange, I ask Lucy about the conversations that she has with her friends. Within her response she shuffles between her friends from her working-class milieu and her friends’ middle-class milieu of Stellar University. Here, Lucy evidences the notion that she is in a constant flux of moving between two worlds of knowing and not knowing, of speaking with authority and insecurity.

Evidenced in Lucy's words is a dissonance, the gap between Lucy's compulsion to discuss current affairs and the valued topics of conversations of her social milieu provides a clear evidence of Ingram's (2009) *habitus tug*. Lucy's comments illustrate her innate disposition to engage in particular topics of conversation, yet also illustrates its incompatibility and devaluation within a working-class field – as Lucy's family and friends highlight through their utterances. Lucy tells me when she attempts to have such conversations with her friends and family at home often they “*say something like urgh*”. Interestingly, however, Lucy's comments evidence that whilst her desire to discuss current affairs does not fit within a working-class social milieu, she does not feel fully at ease in engaging in said topics when among her middle-class. Speaking of the middle-class field of the elite university Lucy comments “*other times I feel like that I am not as educated as they are in some kind of things*”. Here we witness the mismatch between Lucy's largely working-class *habitus* and the middle-class field of the elite university and the disjuncture between the two.

Lucy's narrative evidences confusion and ambivalence as to where to place herself. Whilst we witness glimpses of superiority, we also witness glimpses of insecurity. Whilst there is a misalignment between the dispositions of Lucy's *habitus* within a working-class field, there is also a sense of fraudulence and insecurity when the dispositions of Lucy's *habitus* is exercised in the middle-class field. She does not fully and effortlessly fit in neither a working or middle-class field, and so, instead, she is left straddling both. Skeggs (1997b) has written of a similar sense of dislocation and of nonbelonging within both a working and middle-class field as a result of educational success at university. As Skeggs (1997b: 131) writes: “I knew I could never be part of or belong to my new

cultural group. But neither could I go back”. Reflecting upon her life in the academy, she continues to write: “I feel a fraud, I feel that one day somebody will find out that I should not really be here” (1997b: 133).

The acquisition of new forms of cultural capital that were incompatible within participants' working-class fields of origin and the subsequent notion of straddling two cultural worlds was a theme present throughout participants' narratives – and one matched in existing research pertaining to working-class educational success (Abrahams and Ingram 2013; Baxter and Britton 2001; Ingram 2009, 2011, 2018). However, not all participants, at all times, experienced internal conflict and struggle as a result of moving in, out, and across both a working-class (participants' home locale and field of social origin) *and* middle-class (the elite university) field. Jack, for example, reflecting upon his friendships formed at university and in his working-class milieu, informs me that his university and home friends are distinctly different. Elucidating the way in which his university and home friends are, to echo Jack: “*different, they are all really different, really different*” informs me that his home friends are:

Just pretty standard, like go down the pub drink a pint, go out on the lash all the time. I mean there are people like that here but it's kinda, I dunno, it's not the same. Like, at home if I organise to see my friends it is generally accepted that one of us is going to bring some beers or we meet in the pub. That's kind of how I spend times with my friends at home.

In contrast, when describing how he spends time with his friends at university Jack tells me:

We play a lot of chess or board games, stuff like that. If we go to the pub its usually to eat its not to just go out drinking. We organise walks, or bike rides or like things to do.

Jack is clear from the outset that his socialising practices could never cross fields. When asked as to whether he would play chess or organise a walk with his home friends Jack comments:

No... I wouldn't consider it an enjoyable thing to do with them... it's just not an activity I would do with them.

Throughout Jack's narrative, it appears that there is no misalignment between habitus and field. His narratives hint at accommodation as it presents as if his habitus accepts the structures of both the middle-class and working-class field that he occupies – and it seems that his habitus responds with ease. There also appear to be no conflicting dispositions. However, the extent to which this is the case is questionable. Just like the working-class grammar school boys of Ingram's (2011: 294) study, Jack is “experiencing life simultaneously in juxtaposing fields”. However, there is no evidence of a habitus tug, no evidence that he is being pulled by the structuring forces of the two differing fields. Instead, Jack evidences an ability to activate different aspects of his habitus,

activating dispositions that are aligned with the field in which he occupies at a given time. This is evidenced above when Jack makes it clear that he has never, and would never, allow his socialising practices to cross fields. To quote Ingram (2011: 301), Jack evidences a “capacity to manifest different dispositions in accordance with different fields”.

The Role of Language and Accent: Change and Continuity

Jamie: I know for fact my accent has improved massively

In addition to acquiring new cultural tastes in their interests, pursuits and leisure activities, participants also spoke about the role of language and accent. The role of accent and language was discussed in ambiguous, ambivalent, contradictory and confusing ways. As I have discussed in chapter three, some participants spoke at length about the way in which their working-class accent and way of speaking marked them out within the middle-class field of the elite Stellar University and how this fostered feeling of non-belonging. In this same vein, some participants, not all, but most, commented upon the way in which, as a result of their elite Stellar University attendance their accent had neutralised, and of their newly acquired middle-class language of academia. Sociologically, through a Bourdieusian lens, this can be understood as a process of acquiring new forms of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986).

As has been discussed in chapter one, much has been written about the way in which a working-class culture is not valorised within education (Reay 2001) and of the way in which within schools and education per se, working-class culture is misrecognized and challenged (Ingram 2009). Central to said discussions is the way in which the working-class language is not recognised as having value within education. Indeed, the language of education is often unnecessary complex, obscure and elitist – it is aligned with the middle-class habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) and speech code (Bernstein 1971, 1975, 1990). By demanding that those in academia speak in the elaborated speech code, middle-class students are advantaged over working-class students in class-discussions, essay writing and in their comprehension and understanding of scholarly texts. As Priya expressed: *“they [the middle-classes] don’t have to sit with a dictionary next to them when doing the course reading”*.

Valarie Hey has written powerfully about the way in which for the working-class subject “academic jargon is *another* language acquired by practice”; the need to translate working-class language “to fit academia”; and of the way in which finding her voice within higher education “has meant and continues to mean a constant negotiation with a cultural code that is not natural” (Hey 1997: 142). Less, however, has been written about the way in which the language of academia is taken on (if at all) by working-class students in elite higher education (and higher education per se) and the implication of this upon participants' relationships with ‘non-educationally mobile’ family and friends. Throughout this study, it was evident that elite university attendance had resulted in participants' acquiring the language of academia – and in some cases also

brought about the neutralisation of local accents and dialects (although to varying degrees).

The acquisition of new forms of middle-class cultural capital as a result of educational success, such as language and accent, not only has the propensity to impact upon the way in which one sees themselves, but also, as the findings from this study revealed, upon relations with friends who inhabit a former world, or rather – in Bourdieusian terms – a working-class field. For the participants of my study, the language of academia was one way in which their class-based habitus developed as result of elite university participation, as participants told me:

Jack: *So I would definitely use words that I wouldn't have before (pauses) in my essays and exams.*

Jessica: *I pay attention to what I am writing and how it comes across, I intentionally include academic words.*

Faith: *I will write my essay and go over it and think that it needs more sophistication like in how it's written.*

The comments of Jack, Jessica and Faith are interesting. Whilst they inform me that they now use words that they previously hadn't, thus suggesting the development of their class-based habitus, they do so with specific reference to

their academic work. This finding contrasts with the experiences of the working-class students of Read et al.'s (2003: 271) study who “spoke of the difficulties they experienced in learning how to understand and utilise such language” associated with the field of academia. Furthermore, the comments of Jack, Jessica and Faith, like many participants of this study, speak of the need to adopt the middle-class language of academia, however they nonetheless envisaged doing so as something “*intentional*” (Jessica). This is further articulated in the comment of Rebecca:

Rebecca: *I'd say my language has got better, my knowledge and use of words yano. Like I know more vocabulary but it's not something that's me. I pick it up and drop it just for academic and study purposes.*

The comment of Rebecca is most insightful. Recognising that she has become proficient in the middle-class language of academia, she informs me that her language has “*got better*”. However, at this same time, she also informs me that the acquisition of said language is not part of her, it is not who she is, as Rebecca comments “*it's not something that's me*”. Rebecca does not conceptualise the acquirement of a new middle-class language as a break from her working-class habitus and her past self, as was the case with Baxter and Britons (2001) mature, working-class students of higher education. Instead, Rebecca describes the acquirement of a new middle-class language as something that she picks up and drops for “*study purposes*” – thus connoting the notion that she has acquired a form of cultural capital, albeit at a superficial level as opposed to a change in herself per se. Even so, might this be evidence of a chameleon linguistic habitus?

To borrow from, and unite the work of Abrahams and Ingram (2013) with and Bourdieu (2000). Despite this, it is clear then, from the perspectives of participants of this study, that their newly acquired middle-class language of academia was envisaged as being nothing more than a tool that they would draw upon in order to successfully play (as participants understood it) the rules of the academic game. However, this was not a straightforward unproblematic experience. As Amy shared with me:

Amy: Sometimes I read something and think how did that come from me. Obviously, after I have spent ages perfecting it making sure there are academic words included.

The comment of Amy is imbued with notions of imposterism, fraudulence and alienation; “*how did that come from me*” – here Amy questions the fruits of her intellectual labour. Within the above quote, academic work is not envisaged by Amy as the written manifestation of her academic ability and effort, but regarded as something separate from her: she does not envisage the work being her own. The time spent “*perfecting*” the work and “*making sure*” the middle-class language of academia is included evidences acquirement and inclusion of the middle-class language of academia as something deliberate: an act. However, whilst participants spoke about consciously appropriating vocabulary and actively adopting the language of academia for credentialised learning, the acquirement of the language of academia was also, at times, a disposition that they appeared to embody, appearing tentatively installed. Although, this was

something that participants were hesitant to admit, as the two excerpts from my participant observation field notes allude to:

Today, whilst walking around Amy's locale we bumped into some of her friends. Amy introduced me to them referring to me as 'someone from uni', she did not mention the project. The encounter was brief and exchanges kept to pleasantries. We weren't recording at this point but rather just bimbaling around. Nonetheless, the interaction was an interesting one. I couldn't help but notice the way in which Amy spoke. Her accent seemed stronger, and slang expressed, 'nah' drawn upon instead of 'no', 'ain't' instead of 'isn't'. This encounter got me thinking. Why did Amy not mention I was from the university conducting research? Was the use of slang and the upscaling of her local accent intentional? Or was Amy unaware of such changes? I didn't question Amy on this. I didn't want to. I didn't want to make Amy feel as if I was questioning her, interrogating her, somehow accusing her of being fraudulent with who she is, of having two personalities, a Jekyll and Hyde almost. Later on that day however, I did ask Amy as to why she didn't tell her friends that we had met earlier that day that I was conducting research with her about her experience of university. She informed me that explaining what the research would be about would be complicated and that they would not 'get it'.

I left our conversation at that.

(Fieldwork diary September 2016)

Similarly, a second filed note reads:

I met Lewis outside the library as I had done before and as we were walking across campus to an eatery to grab some food and catch up over an interview when his phone rung. He answered and without a question his northern accent was stronger instantly. He was talking to his mum about coming home for Easter, and, although it was only a short conversation, I found his ability to pick up and drop his northern accent striking. It was if Lewis was an accent mimic, but then not really because the accent that he ‘picked up’ was his home accent, his northern accent.

(Fieldwork diary November 2016)

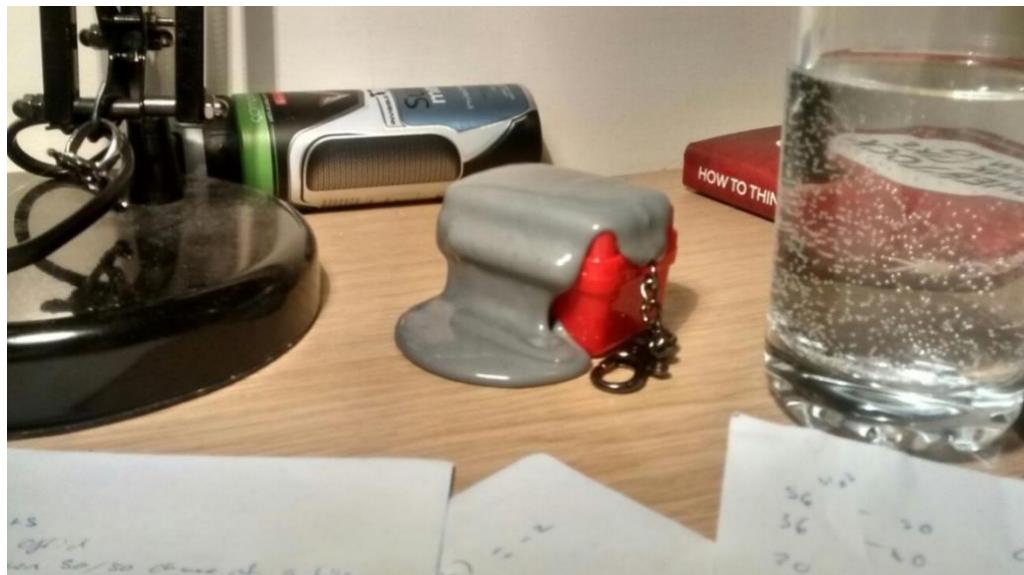
However, unlike Amy, I asked Lewis about the way in which he sounded, to me more northern on the phone to his mum. My filed notes continue to read:

When Lewis got off the phone, I don’t know why, but I just said to him “you sounded so much more northern then”, it just came out in conversation. I wasn’t really in research mode. I didn’t ask him this questions for research purposes, that wasn’t at the forefront of my mind. I didn’t put much thought into asking him this. I just did. It just slipped out almost. Upon reflection, I felt more comfortable asking Lewis about his accent than I had done in the past with other participants. This wasn’t due to any interpersonal factors; I just think because it felt natural to. Like, I had overheard him talking on the phone and it was obvious he sounded more northern and so I felt more comfortable

asking Lewis about the way in which his accent changed – in part because it happened when I was with him on the university campus and not in his working-class locale where I would have been a visitor.

Whilst I cannot be sure as to why Lewis picked up his local accent and slang, it was evident that the way in which some of the participants spoke when among a working-class locale and when conversing with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and family changed. Was this the result of a conscious desire to repress such characteristics when among their field of social origin? Or an expression of participants’ ‘learner’ and ‘social’ identities that Reay et al. write of (2010). In asking this question, I do not wish to imply that participants are not being their authentic selves. Rather, I want to suggest that it makes sense to think of participants as having different senses of the self. It was not uncommon for participants to think of themselves living in two worlds, often straddling the two. This is most poignantly captured within the narrative of Daniel, when reflecting upon his initial intention behind taking the below photo for our photo elicitation interview tells me:

I think this is sort of representing me when I am bridging between the two because it's a part of me that is relevant to, like, me messing around and also the same state of mind when I am in the lab and that's some work that I was doing.



Daniel speaks of “bridging between the two”, his working-class field of origin and the middle-class field of the elite Stellar University. He is at home, at his parents’ house “messing around” with his ‘clever putty’ but he is also in the “same state of mind” when he is in the lab (the middle-class field of the elite Stellar University). However, not all participants were able to bridge their two worlds. “Acquiring a new language goes hand in hand with acquiring new knowledge” (Baxter and Britton 2001: 94), and for the participants of this study, this appeared to have profound effects upon their relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and family. Specifically, just as Baxter and Britton (2001) had found, the newly acquired language of academia challenged former relations. The narratives of Duncan, Jessica and Jodie provide a window into the experience of straddling two cultural worlds – of occupying space in both a middle-class (the elite university) and working-class (participants' home locales) field alongside the centrality that language, accents and cultural dialects occupy within the social mobility experience.

Duncan: *Sometimes down the pub they're like 'here Duncan goes again with his big words and uni talk' and, I dunno, sometimes I'm like 'I'm just talking normally' [...]*

Jessica: *Err yeh, like yano, I'll be talking and I dunno (pauses) I remember (pauses) one time my mate she was like 'calm down with the big words' and like 'don't use them big words round me' [...]*

Jodie: *Me mates joked around that I'll go away lose me accent and start speaking all differently, but I dunno if I have changed in that way. I'd like to think I am the same. I feel the same, But I dunno, Like I wouldn't change how I speak in an interview or anything, I am me and I'm not changing but I dunno sometimes they make remarks...*

Carli: *What do they say?*

Jodie: *Just like doing all this new stuff, talking about new stuff like it's not really anything, but I dunno, occasionally it's like oh I've changed I speak all this and that way. But to me I've not changed, you know, it's just growing up – maturing.*

Interestingly, the aforementioned quotations make clear that whilst their 'non-educationally mobile' family and friends view them as having acquired the

language of academia, this was a change that participants were reluctant to accept. Duncan makes the point that he was “*just talking normally*” and Jodie’s quote makes clear that she doesn’t see herself as changing “*in that way*”. However, the exchange between Jodie and myself evidences her ambivalence. She is reluctant to speak of the way(s) in which she feels she has changed, defensive almost at the thought that she had changed. She outright states that she would refuse to modify the way she speaks in interviews and the like (and she was not the only participant to state this). Yet at this same time, her comments reveal that she envisages such changes as part of life’s journey, as part of growing up and maturing – and it is at this point that Jodie’s comments are highly insightful from a social mobility perspective.

Jodie’s discourse reveals an understanding of such changes not through a discourse of social mobility, not as a movement away from a working-class habitus, which as Baxter and Britton (2001:87) argue is an “inevitable consequence of being in higher education”, but rather an outcome of one’s journey through life – the result of growing up and maturing as opposed to ‘becoming educated’. Such understanding contrasts to dominant discourse of social mobility whereby working-class persons often submit and acculturate into the middle-classes (Friedman 2014, Reay 2013, Skeggs 2004, Tyler 2013). Further to this, the quotes of Duncan, Jessica and Jodie evidence a dissonance, a disjuncture between participants’ newly acquired embodied cultural capital (the middle-class language of academia) and the valued speech pattern of their working-class social milieu (the local dialect).

Whilst participants reflected upon the language of academia as being nothing more to them than playing the academic game, the aforementioned reflections from Duncan and Jodie reveal, to an extent, their embodiment of a more middle-class way of speaking – even when among a working-class field. This illustrates participants' somewhat innate disposition to speak in a way that is more aligned with a middle-class field. However, such way of talking was not valued in a working-class field and it was not uncommon for participants to report that their 'non-educationally mobile' peers would comment and, in some cases, critique such way of talking.

For example, within interviews, Jessica and Duncan shared anecdotes. Jessica was told “*don't use them big words round me*” and “*calm down with the big words*” whereas Duncan friends commented “*here Duncan goes again with his big words and uni talk*”. The anecdotes of Duncan, Jessica and Jodie provide clear evidence Ingram's (2009) habitus tug which, occurring when “habitus is caught in a tug between two conflicting social fields” (Ingram and Abrahams 2016: 145). As Bourdieu writes: “thus it can be observed that to contradictory positions, which tend to exert structural “double binds” on their occupants, there often correspond destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering” (2000: 160 cited in Ingram and Abrahams 2016: 146). Whereas, Ingram's habitus tug occurs “where conflicting dispositions struggle for supremacy and the individual can at times feel pulled in different directions” (Ingram 2011: 290).

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter builds on chapter three and has explored the experiences of working-class students at an elite university exploring the effects of university attendance upon working-class students' relationships with their home communities and friends. In doing so, I have addressed my first and second research question. Following on from this, in chapter five I seek to further explore the effects of elite university attendance upon participants' connections to family and friends. Specifically, I seek to explore participants' relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' working-class siblings and romantic partners paying particular attention to the emotions aroused for all and to the gendered intersections of such experience(s).

Chapter 5. Sibling Rivalry and Romantic Rifts, the Pains and Possibilities of Elite University attendance and Participants' Perceptions of Social Class and Social Mobility

Introduction

Sitting on a campus bench drinking iced coffee under the cool afternoon sun in June myself and Scarlett watch on as an array of students run around handing in dissertations to departments and returning books to the library in preparation for the summer break. Sitting back, observing the construction of the outdoor marquee in preparation for the graduation ball I turn to Scarlett and enquire “are you excited to be graduating”. “I am” Scarlett replied, instantly bursting into tears. I looked at Scarlett unsure if they were tears of joy or sadness. “Are you ok” I asked? “I’m so sorry, it’s just overwhelming. He said I would never make it to graduation, he said I was just wasting my time, being selfish not putting the boys first wanting to go off and do all this and now it’s here, it’s overwhelming. Like how far I have come, I have come full circle and I can start to give the boys the life they deserve, the things they deserve” Scarlett replied. “I can only imagine how you must be feeling right now. You have done so well, worked so hard and you deserve to enjoy every minute of your graduation experience”. She nodded and wiped her tears away before looking out and across at the university campus that appeared as if it were glittering amidst the afternoon summer sunshine. (Fieldwork Diary June 2016)

In the above scene, Scarlett a young mum of two young boys, herself a late teen when they were born, reflects on her journey to and through Stella University. It was a trajectory that was fiercely ‘forbidden’ by her former partner and the father of her two young boys. As Scarlett shared: *“He outright told me that if I was going to continue with my education that he would leave me and the boys. He said I wasn’t doing what was best for the family but being selfish and putting myself first... I didn’t think he would leave, disown his boys, but he did.”* Despite her partners’ stance towards her education Scarlett continued to pursue an undergraduate degree at the University of Stellar, juggling the demands of motherhood and university life and later graduated with a 2.1 degree in social sciences and progressed into the world of work. But doing so was no easy journey, and, as the above extracts indicate, cost her the family unit.

The above scene provides a window into the experience of being working-class and educationally successful, and the effects of educational success on one’s ties to working-class individuals and communities. This is what I attend to in this chapter which explores the effects of elite university attendance upon relationships with ‘non-educationally mobile’ working-class siblings and romantic partners and upon participants future social class positioning. In doing so, particular attention is paid to emotions aroused for all and to the gendered intersections of such experience(s). This chapter then progresses to explore the ways in which the participants of this study conceptualized social-class; the extent to which participants perceive social mobility through formal education: a) as being possible, and b) as a desirable ideal that they strive for. In doing so, this chapter offers a four-tiered typology regarding the various ways in which working-class, first-generation students conceptualise social class and social mobility as a result of their educational success and attendance at an elite institution.

To elucidate the method behind the data that forms the crux of this chapter, I wish to echo Finn's argument who, when reflecting upon her decision to draw upon three case study participants in order to explore young women in higher education and the consequential shifting emotional dimensions of home, argues that:

One of the main benefits of qualitative methodology is the richness and depth of data that are produced. However, drawing out the complexities and temporal dimensions of relationship and personal change can be difficult in the limited space of a research article. As a way to overcome this without losing important nuances of experience, the discussion that follows is based on an in-depth analysis of three individual cases (2014: 39).

Therefore, the discussion that follows in this chapter is largely based on an in-depth analysis of two case study participants of Steve and Luke with supplementary data from additional participants to provide a richer, deeper and considered analysis. For example, in the case studies of Steve and Luke I have drawn upon interviews that I conducted with family members and romantic partners when exploring the effects of elite university attendance upon participants' relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' siblings and romantic partners. The cases selected provide insights into the way in which respondents experienced change in family relationships, and of the emotions elicited and experienced as result of their attendance at Stellar University. Whilst the inclusion of said participants, is, to echo Finn "as they engaged in active study [... and] due in part to the narrative style of participants and also their

ability to speak fluently and reflexively about their experiences” (2014: 40). Their cases were also selected to convey diverse experiences that appear unique at first glance yet are nonetheless somewhat common in that they all “tell a painful story of disconnection from family, of dreams that are outside of family expectations... and of the tensions involved in these processes” (Ingram 2018: 1-2). Furthermore, with regards to participants (case studies or otherwise) it is important to note that such tensions were more acute for participants who had siblings and/or were in romantic relationships with ‘non-educationally mobile’ working-class persons. Therefore, these participants’ narratives are more represented in the data presented below. In the latter body of this chapter, when presenting participants’ conceptualisations of social-class and social mobility I draw upon data generated via interviews, driving and walking tours and participant observations to inform my analysis. Importantly, I wish to stress that whilst these are narratives about changing relations they are also stories of class and mobility in flux.

Sibling Rivalry and Romantic Rifts

I want to tell the story of Steve and Luke. Both are white working-class, first-generation students and would be considered ‘local’ to the area in that they grew up in – within a thirty-mile radius from Stellar University. I want to try and unpick what Luke and Steve shared about their experience of educational success in order to disrupt dominant discourses pertaining to social mobility. Much like the way Reay (2002) troubled dominant masculinity discourses in *Shaun's Story: Troubling Discourses of White Working-Class Masculinities*. To do so, I attend to the way(s) their attendance at Stellar University impacted their relationships with ‘non-educationally mobile’ family members and romantic partners. Before I do so, a brief note regarding Luke and Steve.

Steve is a White British student raised on social security. He was a recipient of free school meals throughout his primary and secondary education. Steve attended an Ofsted ‘special measures’ school owing to the fact that just 17% of his cohort achieved the benchmark A* - C GCSE pass rate. He described himself as being “*extremely shy*” and mentioned that he was “*bullied a lot*”. At first a high achiever at school, he became apathetic towards education as Steve himself told me, “*I was doing really well in classes but nobody was noticing, I stopped caring, my grades started to slip I just couldn’t be bothered listening in class I felt I knew it all anyway which is an arrogance standpoint*”. After a number of years of insecure precarious work Steve returned to education via an access course. The youngest of three siblings he had an older brother who worked as a mobile phone repairman – although at the time of the interview he had recently been made redundant – and an elder sister who worked part-time as an office clerk and is currently engaged. The support that Steve received from his family in relation to his decision to embark on a degree at Stellar University ranged from “*incredibly supportive*” to outright “*indifferent*” depending on who he was referring to. Steve graduated with a first-class engineering degree, placed second amongst his cohort. Upon graduation, Steve secured a graduate job in engineering and moved away from home. Throughout the fieldwork, Steve indicated that he possessed a strong sense of social justice and an acute awareness of the educational inequalities pervading all levels of the UK’s education system. The motif of equality of opportunity and fulfilling one’s potential was central to Steve’s narrative.

Luke was one of five children (the second eldest), he dropped out of education early on in his secondary education leaving with no formal qualifications. Raised on social

security, Luke received free school meals. He described his parent's attitude towards his education as "*easy going [...] relaxed*" and in hindsight "*would have liked them to care more*". Luke informs me that they often slept in until midday and that his grandfather largely raised him and his siblings picking them up from their parents' home and taking them to school. Luke shared that his younger five-year-old sibling was currently not in school owing to his mum forgetting to enrol him. Luke often commented that he felt guilty about being raised on benefits owing to his perceptions that there are "*others who need it more*" and that he "*wants to do better*" – thereby internalising the neoliberal subject. Luke identified as White British and studied a healthcare course at Stellar University. A motif of 'betterment' and 'escape' was central to Luke's narrative. He spoke about wanting to be a role model for his siblings and encouraged them to pursue education. In his final year of university, Luke was nominated for a student award, secured a graduate job and was due to move in with his girlfriend who he had met at Stellar University.

Steve's Siblings

During our first interview (that lasted 4.5 hours) Steve spoke at length about the implications of his educational success upon his relationship with his 'non-educationally mobile' family. The support that Steve received in relation to his decision to embark on a degree at Stellar University ranged from "*incredibly supportive*" to outright "*indifferent*" depending on who he was referring to. Reflecting upon his relationships with siblings Steve told me that whilst his brother was very pleased that Steve was going to university he wasn't interested in his university career. Although, as Steve notes, this interest has nonetheless grown over time:

Steve: when I told him I was going to university he was very pleased cos he noticed I hadn't been employed for a long time and he was like yes I do think you need a change. Now he is incredibly supportive he wants to come to graduation which I didn't think he would be bothered about it. I dunno I just didn't think that it would be that important to him.

And:

Like, my brother wasn't as interested in it at the beginning as I don't think he quite understood what I was doing. But now he understands more... He really does ask me quite a lot about what's going on and like my dad does to be fair. Like, my dad asks me a lot about what I am doing but my sister just doesn't.

Steve was keen to inform me that whilst his brother and father understand little about university they nonetheless ask him how it is all going. Thus, the implication is that his mother, father and brother all support his attendance however partial and lacking in resources this support may be. This is in stark contrast to the relationship that he has with his sister who Steve distinguished from the rest of his family. Steve's relationship with his sister was the one that appeared to be the most effected by his participation and successful completion at Stellar University. Their relationship was central to his narrative for it was one of rift and tension which he directly attributed to his attendance at Stellar University. Within our discussion, Steve explained how the rift unfolded, how he made sense of the situation, and the wider implications on their relationship:

Steve: *My sister is the weird one, we are a lot less close than we used to be. We were very close as kids (pause) I dunno if she's (pause) my girlfriend thinks she's jealous. I think she feels that my sister is another one who thought I wouldn't hack it for five years. Erm and because she did apply for university but never ended up going and so I think she regrets that and she was kinda hoping I'd fail and she wouldn't feel as bad about that now that I have been successful. Like, she never asks me how my exams have gone and, like, I've just finished my exams last week and she hasn't asked me at all how it's gone. She doesn't know any of my grades or anything like that she's never asked.*

In the above extract, note that whilst Steve demonstrated self-awareness that his relationship with his sister has become strained and that they are “*a lot less close*” than they used to be, he also evidenced a hesitancy to speak of the possible jealousy that his sister may have felt in relation to his educational success at Stellar University. Steve was keen to inform me that the accusation of jealousy is one that his girlfriend has put forward and not him. As Steve tells me: “*I dunno if she's (long pause) my girlfriend thinks she's jealous*”. Whilst Steve did not accuse his sister of being jealous he shared with me a possible reason as to why this might be the case. Steve's sisters' own decision to not study at university plays no small part in explaining her possible jealousy which, as Steve reasoned, was implied when she did not enquire into Steve's progress – how his exams went or his grades. The discussion between myself and Steve continued:

Carli: *She's never known any of your grades?*

Steve: *Not since the foundation year (pause) since then she's not cared to ask, she's not said anything about it she's not particularly happy well not happy but she is not particularly bothered by the fact that I have actually managed to get a job out of it as well. And I dunno, that hurts me a bit and my girlfriend noticed it and just she's quite weird about it. When I told her I was going she was like, 'Oh wow you need to do this' and she was doing a course at the time and one of her essays was about somebody in your life who inspires you and she wrote about me cos she was like, 'He has been through all this crap and he's done a five-year degree' and like now she just doesn't want to hear about it. Her finance, I am really good friends with him he will ask about it but not around her. So she must have said, 'Oh I don't want to hear about it'. I don't know what her problem is, it gets to me because when I am earning money she's gonna be the first to come wanting a bit (laughs) and I'm going to be like, 'No, you haven't been supportive and you haven't ever really asked me how it's gone' (pauses) she just doesn't care about it which I find weird considering how close we used to be. And I think she views it as a bit of a bigheadedness even though I never talk to her about it.*

In the above extract, Steve constructed his sister as someone who was once not only supportive of his decision to study at Stellar University but inspired by his decision. Now that picture is very different and as Steve commented, his sister now “*doesn't want to hear about it*”. Within Steve's words and throughout the exchange we witness ambivalent and deeply contradictory feelings. Steve's subjective lived experience of educational success, and thus of upward social mobility in flux elucidates well with what Friedman (2015) refers to as the “emotional imprint of social mobility”, and what Sennett and Cobb (1977) have infamously called “the hidden injuries of class”. These

feelings transition between pain and anger albeit both of which are accompanied by disappointment and confusion. On one hand, Steve was “hurt” that his sister does not acknowledge his success and hard work, as well as the effort he has put in and the sacrifices he has made. On the other hand, he was angry that she refused to recognise his educational success. We witness a momentary glimpse of the anger that he felt when Steve spoke of withholding the fruits of his university labour: *“when I am earning money she’s goanna be the first to come wanting a bit and I’m going to be like, ‘No, you haven’t been supportive and you haven’t ever really asked me how it’s gone”*. Therefore, whilst Steve evidenced the desire to ‘give back’ to his family as a result of his educational success his desire to do so appears to be dependent upon the extent to which family member(s) actively and vocally recognised and I would also argue explicitly congratulated him on his educational achievement(s) at Stellar University. In Steve’s pain and anger we witness disappointment and confusion, as Steve commented, *“she just doesn’t care about it which I find weird considering how close we used to be”*. The lack of support that Steve receives from his sister was, to him, most puzzling, illogical and irrational. It is evident then from Steve’s narrative that he does not want his academic success to be overly applauded but simply, at times, acknowledged by those he holds dear, his sister included. As Steve’s mum told me during our interview, *“he just wants his hard work to be recognized by her, he has worked so hard and for so long things weren’t going well, just a congratulations Steve”*. This finding, the notion that participants just want their hard work to be recognized permeated the comments of many respondents, not solely those with ‘non-educationally mobile’ siblings.

Steve’s narrative illustrates the sometimes painful experience of educational success and possible social mobility in flux. It also highlights that elite university attendance

can simultaneously be marked by pleasure and possibility (by way of educational success) but also be marked by pain. To borrow from Ingram, Steve's narrative "tell[s] a painful story of disconnection from family, of dreams that are outside of family expectations" (2018: 1-2). His relationship with his sister has been ruptured and it is unclear whether it is possible to repair. Elite university attendance not only fractured relationships experienced by those with 'non-educationally mobile' siblings but also romantic relations, as I shall now discuss.

Luke's Romantic Rift

Luke is an interesting example, not only because he talks of his own experience of navigating elite higher education and the effect this has had on his romantic relations with his 'non-educational mobile partner' but also because we hear from his then partner, Lacy. As the case study biography alludes to, Luke broke up with Lacy a few months after our interview as Luke informed me, "*I wasn't very happy in that relationship so it all worked out for the best*". His narrative, along with that of his partner's, Lacy, illustrate some of "the hidden costs" (Friedman 2014) of educational success and possible social mobility. Whilst Luke's partner was not in education at the time of the interview she had previously started a social sciences access course taking temporary withdrawal halfway through to move from Ireland to England to be with Luke. In one of the interviews I conducted with Luke, Lacy was present. Midway through the interview, during a discussion pertaining to why Luke had chosen to attend university Lacy interjected, informing me that she intended to "pick up" her access course and was hoping to attend university just like Luke. Up until this point in the interview Lacy had remained relatively silent, and so Lacy's interjection that she too planned on attending university can be read as something that she was keen for me to know. During a conversation about moving over from Ireland to England Lacy states:

I have more uni opportunities here though. I was taking an access course and erm I, I, dropped out to move here but I plan on taking it again [...]

Lacy informed me she was planning on attending a college some distance from where she and Luke resided so as to enable her to pick up the access course in April as she did not want to wait until September to start studying again. The discussion, between myself, Luke and Lacy progressed:

Lacy: Loads of colleges do my access course, a lot just start in September

Luke: I think one of your main problems was finding a university that would accept your access course isn't it?

Lacy: Lots of universities do, lots of unis do. There is only one that doesn't and that's Stella University that doesn't accept the access course.

Carli: Oh, what you can't study your course here or you mean the university won't accept the access course qualification?

Lacy: This university won't accept an access qualification for what I want to do, what I want to aspire to.

Carli: *That's interesting.*

Lacy: *I'll also be the first one in my family to go to university.*

Within the above exchange Lacy appeared keen to inform me that she was also in education and just like Luke had the desire to attend university. The desire to attend university is presented as being inherent within her and her motivation – purely self-driven. In Lacys account, there was seldom any evidence of “critical moments” or “significant others” (Reay, David and Ball 2005) that provided access to “hot knowledge” (Ball and Vincent 2006). Lacy evidenced a defensiveness regarding her current educational pathway. When Luke suggested that not all universities accepted her social science access course Lacy responded instantly and abruptly, her voice raised she pointed out that, “*lots of universities do. There is only one that doesn't and that's Stella University*”; thus, making the distinction that Stella University was the only university not to accept her access course. Her statement supports that individuals possess different degrees of choice (Reay et al., 2001, 2005). Furthermore, there is much tension within this exchange, Lacy's language was revealing: Lacy actively constructed herself as wanting to succeed academically, and in doing so evoked a discourse of aspiration and engagement in “doing aspiration” (Allen 2014). This discourse of aspiration was evoked when Lacy stated that attending university was “*what I want to do, what I want to aspire to*”. Yet she also acknowledged the limitations of where she was able to study. Lacy informed me that Stella University did not accept her access course and in doing so implicitly suggested that she cannot succeed in the same way that Luke has. Thus evoking an awareness that “higher

education in the twenty-first century [...] is neither equal nor common for all” (Reay et al., 2005: vii). As Allen writes, “calls to ‘be aspirational’, to ‘become someone’ are both narrowly defined and individualizing, negating the broader inequalities which limit who goes where” (Allen 2014: 761).

Approximately thirty minutes later into the interview, Lacy leaves the on-campus coffee shop where our interview was being conducted to visit another shop on campus before it closed. At this point I was in the midst of asking Luke questions pertaining to life on campus. However, as soon as Lacy got up to leave Luke, scanning the shop floor and watching Lacy leave, changed the topic of discussion. Luke referred back to an earlier point in the interview where I asked him questions about whether or not he felt that he had experienced any conflict or tension with friends or family as a result of his attendance at Stella University. The exchange proceeded as follows:

Luke: I'm pretty sure my girlfriend gets a bit; it does cause a lot of tension with her. Umm, specifically because I talk about it a lot and um I think she feels a little bit neglected because of it and because of how of early I leave and all the work I am putting into it she feels a bit neglected.

Carli: In terms of because you don't have much time?

Luke: For her, yes, and also because she isn't doing anything so much at the moment so she spends a lot of her time in the house wanting to do something

but not really having anything to do, where as she sees me being busy and I think she can get a little bit frustrated about that.

Carli: *Where she wants to be at university?*

Luke: *Yeh and also there's the demographics on my course as well which causes her a bit of stress.*

Carli: *Yeh, yeh. Do you find that because you are doing uni and she wants to do uni that she is quite supportive or not really?*

Luke: *Err yeh, defiantly, I feel like I support her a lot as well. Like I am trying to definitely convince her, like one of the reasons she started her access course was because I was pushing for her to do it. Because she's always wanted to go to college but never managed to and I like to think like that I was really pushing her to start her college course back in Ireland umm so I think I had a good influence on her that way.*

A different story emerges in the accounts of Luke and Lacy. Whilst Lacy spoke of her desire to complete her access course and attend university suggesting a sense of agency, Luke stated that he was “*pushing her to do it*” and was trying to “*convince*” her to study at university. Luke constructs Lacy as passive and not actively involved her educational progression. At the same time, Lacy made few comments that

suggested she was envious of Luke's attendance at Stella University. Luke's narrative painted a different picture. He spoke overtly about the way in which his attendance resulted in Lacy feeling "*neglected*" and "*frustrated*" owing to his university commitments and the subsequent lack of time he had for her. Whilst Luke did not explicitly label Lacy's emotions as jealousy or envy it was nonetheless hinted at through Luke's account of Lacy's frustration and the subsequent tension which, as Luke's account makes clear, caused emotional strain within the relationship. Whilst these conflicting accounts illustrate the benefits of interviewing both the student and their 'non-educationally mobile' other(s) to explore the effects of elite university attendance upon participants 'non-educationally mobile' friends, family and significant other(s). It also highlights the difficulty of consciously acknowledging and labelling negative emotions roused as a result of educational success within those closest to them. The possibility that working-class educationally successful individuals may be the object of competition and envy even among those who they choose to be in romantic, loving relationships with, is a sentiment echoed in the earlier work of Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003).

Within the above quotation there is also a second issue at play. Luke speaks of the way in which the "*demographics*" of his course causes Lacy "*a bit of stress*". When I asked Luke what he meant by this he told me that he is surrounded by many middle-class girls on his course and Lacy is concerned that Luke will meet someone on his course and establish a romantic relationship with them. When I asked Luke why he thought this is he said, "*she's worried I will meet someone that I have more in common with*", which Luke informed me caused Lacy "*stress*". Luke's reference to the fact that his partner is concerned that he will have "*more in common*" with someone on his course can be understood as the result of emerging differences between Lacy and Luke as a

result of Luke's attendance at Stellar University. Lacy's worry and anxiety was triggered by concern that Luke shared greater affinity with females he studied with. Why this is so remains uncertain as I did not ask Lacy ask questions pertaining to Luke's comment as he explicitly requested that I did not share with Lacy what he had told me privately. However, I speculate that within Luke's comments and, indeed within the three-way interview between myself, Luke and Lacy there were hints of insecurity that emerged in Lacy as a result of the expanding 'gap' between her and Luke's formal institutionalized education. It is here we can witness the way in which educational mobility by way of elite university attendance can elicit difficult difference(s) between working-class individuals who pursue education and their 'non-educationally mobile' partners who embark on a different path. Such findings resonate to an extent with the earlier work of Lehmann (2013). Lehmann found that university attendance negatively disrupted family relationships – albeit in relation to participants 'non-educationally mobile' parents and not their romantic relations (the latter of which was not the foci nor finding of Lehmann's study). Specifically, he writes of the way in which participants reported “a disruption cuts both ways [...] a relationship in which neither no longer understands or relates to the other” (2013: 9). The notion that 'non-educationally mobile' female romantic partners felt that their partner might meet someone at university who they would subsequently leave them for was a common theme throughout male participants' responses – those who were in committed romantic relationships with 'non-educationally mobile' female others. I shall now critically discuss this finding in greater depth.

The Role of Envy, Insecurity and Jealousy: How Male Participants Understood and Narrated their ‘Non-Educationally Mobile’ Female Partners Responses to Elite University Attendance

Envy, insecurity and jealousy were themes that ran through the above male participants’ narratives in both explicit and implicit ways when reflecting upon their relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ partners. Participants often spoke about the difficult emotional dynamics that their romantic partners felt as a result of the (growing) gap in educational attainment, educational success, future prospects and the formation of novel social groups. Envy, insecurity and jealousy (reportedly) operated in quite stereotypical ways in relation to culturally recognisable stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. For example, all three of the male participants directly spoke of their partners as “worried”, “insecure” or “paranoid” because they had made friends with female students at university. This was in relation to friendships made on courses, in addition to the wider student body. The following quotations from Jamie and Lewis further illustrate this point:

Jamie: Yeh well she’s defiantly insecure at the fact that I have made some close friends here that are females. As much as I don’t see them outside of study or university life I think it still plays on her mind and sometimes it gets to her a bit, sometimes she will want to know exactly what friends I am with. I know she wants me to list names so can work out if I’ll be with girls or not. It’s a bit annoying.

Lewis: *Well there are a lot of girls on my course, you know because it's [humanities subject] so I think that bothers her a bit just because I am always surrounded by so many girls.*

Despite these male participants' constructions of their 'non-educationally mobile' partners being "worried", "insecure" or "paranoid" about their female university peers the participants' partners may well have been justified in their suspicions. After all, Luke three years after our initial meeting informed me that he had since begun a relationship with a female student from his cohort. In addition to the negative emotions elicited as a result of their female university peers the male participants' narratives were permeated with comments that suggested that their partners were envious of the fact that they were experiencing success within higher education, pursuing a career path that they enjoyed and that scope for progression existed:

Lewis: *Sometimes I think she get a bit funny, you know, because I am doing something that I enjoy and that will take me places, whereas in her job she works at a call centre and that's not so much the case.*

Jamie: *In my first year I really struggled with it all. The studying. I didn't do too good grade-wise but this year I have really surprised myself. I got really good grades for my semester on essays and exams and I don't know, I just kind of got an 'ok' rather than a well done, congratulations. I'm so proud. Like last time I told her and she just said, 'Yeh, yeh you always get such good grades.'*

Carli: *How did that make you feel?*

Jamie: *A bit, a bit disappointed that she didn't recognise my hard work. But then I dunno really. I thought, I thought maybe she does recognize that I work hard but doesn't like that I am doing well.*

In both Lewis' and Jamies' accounts envy is an emotion not directly articulated but implied. Lewis made the comment that his partner “*gets a bit funny*”, an emotion that he attributed to the fact that university study is something that he enjoyed and that will take him places. Similarly, Jamie's account is ambivalent, he spoke of his disappointment that his partner didn't recognise his hard work before sharing with me, without prompt or probe, that he felt that perhaps his partner's apathy stemmed from the fact that she did not like the success that he was experiencing, as opposed to a lack of recognition of his hard work. Despite their ambivalence and their reluctance to label such emotions as envy Lewis' and Jamies' responses seemed to indicate an acute awareness of the fact that their attendance at the University of Stellar aroused envy in their partners, although never overtly articulated.

In contrast, insecurity, unlike envy and jealousy, were emotional responses to their elite university participation that the male respondents of this study appeared to be more at ease giving voice to. Callum articulated a clear and conscious awareness that his elite university participation left his partner feeling “anxious, upset, worried” and with deep seated insecurities. In the following exchange, Callum spoke of his partner being insecure no less than three times. In this exchange we witness the negative

emotions roused when the formation of novel friendships intersected with the (growing) gap in credentialized educational attainment:

Callum: So my girlfriend can get quite down sometimes, she's has point where she has like low self-esteem, insecurities, you know. What she is doing is amazing, she's a nursery nurse and she is so good at what she's does, she is a real natural and it's all she has ever wanted to do really. She grew up with lots of nieces and nephews and small children around. Something she'll just say to me, really upset. She'll say something like how she's loves me so much and that she is so worried that I will meet someone at university that's more on my level and go off with them and she'll lose me.

Carli: More on your level?

Callum: Education-wise. Someone with a degree [...] There is this girl on my course, Florence, she has a boyfriend and everything [...] and sometimes we will just sit and talk like after a seminar or lecture. We will just sit and discuss what we have learned and continue the conversation outside of the class, you know. But I don't really tell Lauren unless it comes up. Like I wouldn't lie but at the same time I wouldn't bring it up. God that sounds really bad like I have something to hide but it's not like that it's just like. She gets a bit [...] I don't know [long pause] anxious, upset, worried. I don't even know [pause] just insecure.

Carli: *Because you are spending time with a girl?*

Callum: *Well yeh, that, but more like [pauses] more like I'm spending time with a girl at uni talking about uni work.*

Carli: *Why would that upset Lauren do you think?*

Callum: *It would upset her because I think she would feel like she can't give me something. That she can't talk to me about my university work, like she got upset before about it. She is very supportive but doesn't like the fact that she can't help, which is a bit silly to be honest because there are people here at university that can't help just because they don't do my course. So I think it's more than that. I think it's because she isn't at university she feels extra insecure about it all.*

As I discussed in the introduction of this chapter, elite university attendance impacted upon participants' relationships with their non 'non-educationally mobile' working-class siblings and romantic partners in ways that were wrought with gendered losses and gains. This chapter now turns to elucidate the female participants of this studies gendered losses and gains.

‘Family First’: Female Participants’ Imagined Futures: Pain, Possibilities and Temporalities

As I have discussed above, attendance at an elite university and possible future social mobility was an experience that elicited much rift, resentment, jealousy and insecurity from male participants’ ‘non-educationally mobile’ partners. Similarly, elite university attendance was equally problematic for working-class, first generation women who were in committed relationships. Yet the associated challenges took on a different form to those that characterised male participants’ experiences. For the women of this study attending an elite university served to change the content, colour, and texture of their romantic relations in ways that called into question current and imagined future romantic relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ working-class partners. It was not uncommon for female participants to discuss at length their motivations for attending Stellar University. Often they shared with me their most intimate hopes and desires upon the successful completion of their degree. Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, central to these narratives lay a discourse of what I term ‘family first’. These women spoke emotively about their desire to provide economically for their future family, often referring to said discourse as a foundational factor motivating them to attend higher education. This is a finding well-matched throughout the literature pertaining to female social mobility through formal education (Luttrell 1997).

In *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Steedman, reflecting on her mother, writes that “from a Lancashire mill town and a working-class twenties childhood she came away wanting: fine clothes, glamour, money; to be what she wasn’t... things she materially lacked, things that a culture and a social system withheld from her” (Steedman 1986: 6). In the contemporary era of rampant consumer culture, working-class desires for

credentialism is, in part, motivated by a longing for the material gains that formal credentialized education brings (Reay 2001). However, this was seldom a desire articulated by the working-class young women of this study. This is not to say that such material desires ceased to exist, in fact one participant commented on how much she admired my designer handbag telling me, “*I just love your Mulberry bag, it’s so smart and professional*” (although unaware it was a ‘fake’ until I later pointed it out). I would argue that perhaps such omissions may in part be due to the participants’ subtle awareness that “women’s desires for, and envy of, respectability and material goods are marked as apolitical, trivial, pretentious” (Lawler 1999: 12). Furthermore, female participants were not solely concerned with securing their own educational success but were compelled to ensure that their children’s educational future was one also marked by success. Discourses of ‘providing’ for one’s family and putting one’s ‘family first’ arose from my data. Such findings may be understood, to some extent, as the result of social pressures placed on working-class women. As McKenzie notes in her ethnography of a council estate, motherhood is highly valued within working-class communities and forms part of the “practices, recourses and process that the residents recognised within, making up the local value system” (McKenzie 2015: 205). By evoking a discourse of ‘family first’ the young women of this study are striking a balance between embarking on a “risky” path (Reay 2003) and one that is understood by some as being “*so indulgent*” (Lucy).

For decades, women have seldom been seen as autonomous individuals. Instead they have been socialised to put the needs of others ahead of themselves in both the home and workplace. Working-class women in the labour market are overwhelmingly found within feminized sectors of the care and service industry working as care-givers, dinner ladies, cleaners and emotional service workers. Given this, it is perhaps to no

great surprise that an ethos of care, and the ideal of ‘family-first’ was ever-present throughout female participants’ narratives, despite the fact that the young women of this study did not yet have their own families. The omission of education as a project of the self and for its own sake from female participants’ narratives is most interesting. Such findings contrast with the work of Reay who found that for the mature working-class women of her study “‘education for its own sake’ was strongly linked to a further commitment to make a contribution to society” (Reay 2003: 304). This commitment to “giving back” (Reay and Mirza 1997) was a classed phenomenon not present within the narratives of middle-class women in Reay’s study. As Bhatti (2003) highlights, there exists a need to care for working-class men and women to serve those less fortunate than themselves.

Writing more than two decades ago of working-class women’s experiences of the academy, Mahony and Zmroczek write that “[working-class] women who have gone through higher education often see themselves as being require to continue an ethic of service to others less ‘lucky’ than themselves” (1997: 5). In contrast, there was seldom any grand evidence of a discourse of community, in other words an “ethic of service to others less ‘lucky’”, within the narratives of my participants, be it female or male. A shift from the community to the self appears to underpin participants’ motivations or desires to pursue a university education. Unlike the mature, working-class women of Reay’s study, the working-class women of Stellar University were unable to “combine processes of individual self-realisation and a greater emphasis on ‘self-actualisation’ with community commitments and the prioritising of others” (2001: 314). I discovered that while women were critical of the rampant individualism that pervades twenty-first century Britain they were nonetheless unable to escape such processes.

Considering female participants' discourse of 'family first', Bhatti's 'need to care' was only ever evoked by working-class young women. In stark contrast, males neither explained, defended nor justified their decisions to pursue a degree at Stellar University in quite the same way: there were seldom any references to providing for one's future family in their narratives. Interestingly, whilst female participants possessed 'a need to care' it was one that appeared somewhat individualized and often evoked through the discourse of 'family first', as opposed to caring for and giving back to a working-class community. Given this apparent (albeit tentative) shift from commitment to the 'community' towards 'family' obligation/responsibility, might we then be witnessing participants' internalization of the neoliberal rhetoric and the subsequent individualisation of responsibility?

In *Neoliberalism, Working-Class Subjects and Higher Education* Walkerdine eloquently contemplates "the central importance of fantasy and imagination to working-class students hoping to go to higher education" (2015: 256). Walkerdine conceptualizes the educational desires of working-class students to be comprised of imaginative fantasy, not to discredit or dismiss the educational aspirations working-class students who hope to attend university but rather to capture the improbable nature of such hope. As Walkerdine argues: "such students may not lack a way of fantasising a set of desires for the future, but are not well supported in education to mobilise these into an imagination which can be acted upon" (2015: 256). However, for the working-class women of this study university attendance was not "the role of fantasy and imagination" (Walkerdine 2015: 258) but a lived reality, albeit not an unproblematic reality. As a consequence of female participants' underpinning motivations of 'family

first', their attendance at university impacted their relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' partners. However, unlike the male participants of this study who spoke of the jealousy that their partners exhibited, the female participants of this study in committed relationships shared how rifts and tensions arose in their relationship as a result of future possible change that served to challenge traditional family gender roles. The females' attendance at Stellar University was coupled with probable likelihood that they would, upon completion of their degree and entering into the graduate labour market, earn a higher income than their 'non-educationally mobile' partners. This challenged traditional gender roles, and in turn their romantic relationships. Specifically, the male breadwinner model of the family and a gendered division of labour that has been central to hegemonic masculinity, an archetype that has characterised most of the twentieth century and that have been at the crux of academic understandings of working-class masculinity (Roberts 2018). As a consequence, this impacted negatively upon and challenged female participants current and possible future romantic relationships with 'non-educationally mobile' working-class others. A phenomenon most acutely and articulately captured within the narratives of Rebecca and Jane when reflecting upon their romantic relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' working-class partners:

Rebecca: Mark had lost his job so I wanted to cheer him up so I suggested we go out for dinner, my treat. Nothing fancy only Nando's and he just made a comment that got me thinking. He said, 'Oh right, is this what I have to get used to then, a taste of what's to come?' He told me that once I am out working that I will just flash my money about all the time. That hurt me. I just wanted to lift his spirits. I've never been flash, I never will. I always downplay things where money's concerned.

Jane: *Well yeh he supports me but (long pause) I dunno, I've never really shared this with anyone really. Like he says he supports me but then on occasions when we're discussing the future, hypothetically like, he comes out with all this stuff about how he doesn't want to be a househusband, how he has no respect for men who sit at home instead of going out to provide for their wife and family and he doesn't mean it in terms of men that just choose not to work, because, you know, the wives make more money. I've spoken to him about it. Put forward the scenario that I might end up earning more money than him, and then what would this mean when we have children? He outright said he would never give up work, that it's not what a real man does, a real man provides no matter what for his family. It's frustrating and annoying and so tunnel visioned. I do wonder [...]*

Within the above quotations, we witness how the possible future acquirement of economic capital causes rift and tension within their romantic partner relationships. For Rebecca, there existed a possibility that her future economic positioning would be greater than that of her 'non-educationally mobile' partner. It was an issue in their relationship that was either shunned at best, and rejected at worst (by him). Rebecca was accused of being "*flash*" and informed that she would ostentatiously parade her relative wealth on graduating from Stellar University, an accusation that left Rebecca feeling "*hurt*". Her intentions were to raise her partner's spirits, as opposed to parade her economic capital. Rebecca's next remark was most interesting; she commented that she "*always downplay things where money's concerned*". Her narrative hints at an awareness that money is a sensitive and emotive subject for her partner. The fact that she actively and consciously sought to "*downplay*" her finances evidences her

awareness of the ambivalence and resentment that characterised her partner's orientation towards her ability; the ability to trade institutionalised cultural capital into economic capital within the graduate labour market, and thus economically capitalise upon her attendance at Stellar University. Such a finding is most insightful, and I argue reflects Rebecca's recognition of the expanding difficult difference(s) that have emerged between herself and her partner as a direct result of her elite university attendance. Omitted from her narrative is any hint of a dismissal of her partner's somewhat 'negative' feelings towards her future accrual of economic capital. This is most illuminating and suggests that she herself is of the opinion that her partner's stance is not entirely unfounded or irrational. Although there is an undercurrent of an emergent and increasing distance between Rebecca and her partner it is interesting to note that Rebecca's narrative is neither moralizing or normative but rather her account is solely descriptive, she appears to have no malicious intent.

The same, however, cannot be said of what Jane told me. In sharp contrast to Rebecca, Jane's narrative was littered with moralising judgements. For Jane, the fact that her partner "*outright said he would never give up work, that it's not what a real man does*" is problematic and elicited deep annoyance. Jane continued, informing me that her partner's view that a "*real man provides no matter what*" is "*frustrating and annoying and so tunnel visioned*". The analogy of a vision that is tunnelled suggests that for Jane, her partner's perspective is defective, limited and prohibitive.

At the heart of Jane's narrative important decisions were being made in the present based on her and her partner imaginings of their future. It appears that a (hetero)-presumption surrounding family, children and normative hetero-gendered roles in

relation to their imagined future. A finding that is worthy of further attention in this study. For Jane, there is the decision, albeit tentative, that the partner whose employment yields the greatest income should remain in the labour market, and the other partner should assume primary responsibility for childcare and domestic duties. For Jane's partner however, this isn't a future that he imagines or welcomes. Within Rebecca and Jane's narratives we witness their partners' acceptance of a dominant archetypal hegemonic masculinity that asserts that the male should be the family breadwinner. Whilst this discourse is hinted at within Rebecca's narrative when her partner reportedly speaks of "*getting used to*" her taking him out, paying for things and "*flash[ing] [...] money about*", the same discourse is more acutely and unequivocally exhibited within Jane's comments. Specifically, the frustration that is elicited within Jane as a result of her partner's rejection and refusal to explore alternatives to the (hetero)sexual model of 'the family' that adheres to hetero-gendered roles. Consequently, Jane's frustration for her partner soon turns into doubt as she hesitantly expresses that she has since questioned the longevity of the relationship in light of her partner's views:

Jane: I can't believe I'm saying this, but if I can be with him, if we are meant to be together, if things will work out after my degree. It's just, if he is willing to lose out on a lot of money just because he thinks a real man should provide, despite the fact that I make more money and would be able to provide more, give us more financial stability and disposable income, then I don't know. I just don't know. That's not doing the best for our family is it? That's just being narrow minded, outdated and selfish. You know, to put his own silly views before what's best for us as a couple and as a family.

We witness an amalgamation of emotions in the above extract. Jane had no trouble articulating the way in which her elite university attendance had affected her relationship with her ‘non-educationally mobile’ boyfriend. Her narrative was marked by significant hesitancy: *“I can’t believe I’m saying this”* and *“I don’t know. I just don’t know”*. These comments suggest that as Jane journeyed through Stellar University and imagined what lay ahead she was confronted with whether or not she would remain with her ‘non-educationally mobile’ working-class boyfriend. However, Jane’s narrative is full of oscillation, confusion, and I argue insecurity as Jane sought approval by asking me, *“that’s not doing the best for our family is it?”*. It is here we witness how the discourse of ‘family first’ was embedded in her understanding of her journey to and through university. Attending Stellar University was, for Jane, as it was for many of the young women of this study underpinned by a desire to provide for one’s future family – as I have previously discussed above. In this way, her partner’s unsupportive stance toward her future labour market positioning was implied when Jane said, *“he doesn’t want to be a househusband”*. Her partner’s lack of support was understood by Jane as a threat to her desire to do what was best for her imagined future family – the very reason Jane gave for being compelled to attend university. This in turn led Jane, as she herself professed, to question her future romantic relationship with her partner.

Just as the narratives of Jane and Rebecca hint, for many (although not all) of the young female participants of this study elite university attendance was envisaged as a challenge to their future possible romantic relationships with ‘non-educationally mobile’ working-class others. This finding cut across participants’ responses regardless of whether or not they were in committed relationships during my fieldwork. Lucy stated, *“It makes me think, who I’ll end up with. Will it be someone*

from home? Someone I grew up with? I don't know I already feel too different" and similarly Jessica more explicitly maintained that *"All the boys at home are bums, like, I want someone more on my level. I dunno if I'd be compatible long term with anyone – the types of boys I went to school with"*. Implicit within Lucy's and Jessica's comments, who were in romantic relationships at the time of their interviews, is a growing misalignment between their developing habitus as a result of elite university attendance and the habitus of those that resided within their working-class field. This was less to do with presumptions of a (hetero)sexual model of 'the family' and more to do with their developing habitus. The question that they asked themselves was thus: Will they or wont they *"end up"* (Lucy) with someone from their working-class field, specifically someone who is not educationally mobile? Partner compatibility was called into question when they reflected on the suggestion that as a result of their elite university attendance they were *"too different"* (Lucy) and desired *"someone more on [their] level"* (Jessica). Someone I argue, with an education as suggested through Jessica's use of the word *"bum"* a colloquialism used to refer to those who are perceived to do nothing productive with their time nor wish to.

Within industrialised countries, working and middle-class women who pursue professional careers are required to balance work commitments with demands that arise from caring and domestic tasks (Mavin and Bryans 2002). A phenomenon conceptualized by Szalai (1966) as a *"double day"*; by Hochschild (1989) as the *"second shift"*; and by Duncombe and Marsden (1995) as the *"triple-shift"* in recognition of the additional emotional work that women are often required to perform. For many of the female participants of this study their 'balancing act' was made harder by the fact that their partners did not support anything other than a traditional gendered division of labour. Over the course of the fieldwork a number of women shared with

me, often through anecdotes, that their ‘non-educationally mobile’ romantic partners had often brought up in conversation both implicitly and explicitly the fact that they would not be happy being a “*househusband*”. Instead, they prided themselves on being “*the provider*” and would not give up paid work to provide childcare and fulfil household domestic duties. In addition to the narratives extrapolated from Jane and Rebecca, extracts from Lucy and Jessica further illustrate this finding in more explicit ways:

Lucy: *I don't really know about the future. He drops hints telling me he never wants to stay home, clean the house, cook, shop and everything.*

Jessica: *Every now and then, when we are thinking about what our future might be, like, he explicitly tells me he always wants to work, that he prides himself on being the provider.*

It is impossible to know whether or not the interpretations of Rebecca, Jane, Lucy and Jessica “were fair or adequate reflections” (Finn 2014: 45) of their partners’ stances towards their imagined future role(s) within the domestic sphere – similar to Finn’s (2014) study of changing family relationships in the context of university attendance. Akin to the case of Luke and his ex-girlfriend, Lacey, there are often discrepancies in participants’ comparative narratives, nonetheless, such a finding is fascinating. Not only is it in opposition to the overall attitudinal decline in support of the female homemaker model (Cunningham 2008 cited in Roberts 2018) but it contrasts starkly with contemporary research on working-class men’s relationships to domestic labour,

masculinity and social change (Roberts 2018). With regards to the domestic sphere, recent research has highlighted the way in which working-class men adhere to a “lived egalitarianism” whereas their middle and upper-class counterparts merely perform a “spoken egalitarianism” (Usdansky 2011; Lyonette and Crompton 2015). Whilst Roberts recognises that there is “no gender egalitarian utopia” (2018: 284) he nonetheless draws upon his research from a seven-year longitudinal study of working-class young men’s transitions into adulthood to concluded that there is “great evidence of how engagement with housework and childcare is regular and normalized for contemporary working-class young adult men” (2018: 284).

So then, how does one explain this study’s findings given its deviation from the existing body of literature? Is there anything distinct and specific we can propose in relation to social class? I want to argue, yes. However, in doing so I want to step away from dominant versions of white working-class masculinities which as Reay writes “for so long have been key repositories for all those unpleasant, uncomfortable feelings the middle classes don’t want to take responsibility for - sexism, racism, homophobia, to just name a few” (2002: 231). Instead, let’s consider the alternative issues at play. There is of course classic ‘old fashioned’ sexism permeating the above narratives, and I do not wish to deny or downplay this. However, as Roberts notes, “there is considerable emphasis in academic and popular discourses about working-class men’s stronger attachment to traditional modes of masculinity and breadwinner ideals – it is such men whose masculinity is often positioned as being ‘in crisis’ (see Alimahomed-Wilson 2011; Roberts 2014)” (Roberts 2018: 285). Thus, in seeking to move beyond such an understanding I want to argue that such issues are more acute among working-class participants at Stellar University (and university per se) given that the possibilities that an elite university education opens up had, historically, been

somewhat alien to working-class communities. In addition, there are also temporal aspects to the classed, gendered and relational experiences of my female participants. The precarious nature of the current and future labour market (Standing 2011) may mean that we need to reconsider the idea that female participants partners desired hetero-gendered roles with the (hetero)sexual model of ‘the family’ will need to be reconsidered in later life as the participants and their male partners become parents, and there is a greater strain on their economic recourses.

Of course, attending university is a time of heightened personal change, an experience characterised by great flux and transformation for all individuals who embark on such a journey – not solely those from working-class, first-generation backgrounds (Wilcox et al., 2005; Christie et al., 2007; Christie 2009; Holton 2014;). For both working and middle-class students, university is often a time where romantic relationships transform, where new ones emerge and old relations are called into question (Finn 2013, 2015). However, I want to focus upon and subsequently raise important questions about the way in which, for the young working-class women of this study, elite university attendance brought about gendered challenges within their romantic relationships. Educational success for working-class women has always been problematic (Hey 1997; Reay 1997; Skeggs 1997; Lawler 1999). The reality of working-class female participants living out their desires, desires that are all too often the role of fantasy (Walkerdine 2011) and pursuing an elite university education to embark into the graduate labour market poses somewhat of a threat to their ‘non-educationally mobile’ male working-class partners. The rifts and tensions evidenced above, and in the albeit extreme but very real case of Scarlett’s family breakdown, presented at the beginning of this chapter, provides clear evidence of the barriers working-class women encounter when they attempt to move beyond their ‘place’:

educationally, economically or otherwise. For the female participants of my study these difficulties were not simply hurdles to be overcome, to navigate around, nor bumps in the road that would soon be filled. Instead, the aforementioned difficulties were aroused as a result of elite university participation. The probable likelihood that they would upon completion of their degree and upon entering into the graduate labour market earn a higher income than their partners served to open up the ground between and challenge their romantic relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ working-class partners. It is in this way that the female participants’ prospective abilities to convert their institutionalised cultural capital into economic capital opened up new possibilities at the same time as shutting down existing ones. Herein lay one pleasure that elite higher education afforded the female working-class, educationally successful participants of this study, although one that is simultaneously experienced as pain. As Lucy, Melody and Walkerdine (2003: 297) write, reflecting upon the experience of working-class women who are successful in education:

Not only are working-class girls who do well at school and go on to higher education moving into intellectual and occupational spheres traditionally seen to be masculine, they are also moving out of their class sphere, beyond the wildest dreams of anyone in their families, into clean, professional, interesting jobs. Just moving into the intellectual domain is a massive shift for them, requiring a complete internal and external ‘makeover’.

Just as the above extract encapsulates, the women of this study were aware that they were breaking class and gender boundaries. However, in my study, as working-class women’s ambivalent, contradictory and at times contesting narratives allude to,

attendance at an elite university was experienced neither as exclusively liberatory nor oppressive but instead as a complex mixture of the two. The stories of Rebecca and Jane eloquently capture the university experience, “how complex it is and indeed how exciting yet frightening it is, to contemplate a change from the family experience” (Walkerdine 2011: 258). Despite the dominant pervasive public discourse asserting that women ‘can have it all’ coupled with the structural reality that young women have “been the major beneficiaries of the expansion project within the sector in the UK” (Finn 2015: 146), when it comes to the experiences of Jane, Rebecca and Scarlett they offer a less celebratory narrative than the dominant political and lay rhetoric currently circulating. The future possibility of combining educational success, work and family commitments was not one well supported by their partners at the time of fieldwork. And so, the female participants were struck by the realisation that their current romantic relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ working-class others were no longer entirely compatible with their prospective future selves and trajectories. It is in this vein, as Morley writes, that “for working-class women becoming ‘educated’ is a complex combination of achievement, struggle and betrayal” (1997: 114).

Elite University Attendance, Class Conceptualization and Perceptions of Social Mobility

The problem that the concept of ‘class’ describes is inequality.

(Tyler 2015: 493)

In chapter four and the aforementioned body of this chapter I have sought to elucidate the effects of elite university attendance upon participants’ relationships and connections to working-class culture, their family members and romantic partners. This next section contributes to sociological debates pertaining to social-class, social mobility and the role of elite education (and education per se) in facilitating social mobility. Specifically, I explore the ways in which participants of this study conceptualised social-class; and the extent to which participants perceive social mobility through formal education a) as being possible and b) a desirable ideal that they strive for. In doing so, I propose a four-tiered typology regarding the various ways in which the working-class, first-generation students conceptualise social class and social mobility as a result of their educational success by way of their attendance at the elite, Stellar University.

However, in doing so, a brief note regarding the interpretation of the data and subsequent typology formation. It was not possible to map the different categories of individuals within the typologies to different experiences of elite university attendance. Whilst there were similarities between participants’ narratives there were cross overs in terms of how they conceptualised social-class and perceived social

mobility as possible and/or desirable and so such data could not easily be ‘put to work’ in this way. Forming ‘neat’ categories for classification and exploration would have overlooked the complexity, the nuances and heterogeneity of participants experiences of Stellar University. It was not possible to write in a prescriptive way where one plus one equalled two, more often than not, one plus one equalled something other than two. I do not see this as a shortcoming, as Skeggs (1997a: 31-32) notes:

The desire for control is a fantasy and cannot be enacted in the research process. This does not mean that we cannot be rigorous and systematic about what we do, rather, that there are gaps, lacks and spaces which we cannot know or control...searching for coherence is an impossibility, an ideal and a fantasy

Typology 1: Class Anchor(s)

Jack: *Class, it's just in you, you're born with it. I'll always be working-class*

When we hear the utterance ‘anchor’ we might think of a vessel tied down, motionless, its movement restricted. The heavy hook drooped from the vessel affixed deep into the base of the ocean ensuring that the boat remains firmly in place, unable to move freely without restriction or drag. However, anchor within the context of class anchors is not meant to signify the weighing down of a working-class background and a working-class social position nor is it meant to connote the notion that it fixes one to place or holds one back. Rather, class anchors, within the context of this study refers to the way in which the participants of this study understood that being working-class and

embodying a working-classness will forever be a part of their subjectivity. To echo Hey, class anchors conceptualise an “‘under the skin’ sense of an intractable (working-class) class identity” (1997: 143). As the quotations of Jack above encapsulates. Class anchors seldom espoused a discourse of social mobility, they did not envisage themselves as refashioning their classed identity in any way nor did they envisage their class positioning changing in the future as a result of elite university attendance. In contrast to dominant mobility discourses (Reay 2013) a working-class position was not something understood by class anchors as something that one needed to escape from. For class anchors, class is resilient and enduring, it forever retains its shape and not something educational success can easily re-fashion. Such conceptualisation is most palpable when Katie argues:

I'll always be working-class, it doesn't matter if you try and speak clearly, play down your accent or just because you would rather read a book rather than go to the pub. You can be working-class and enjoy reading, you can be working-class and have a university level education. Class is more than that stuff, it's in you, your born with it, it doesn't just go away.

Class-anchors echo Kuhn when she infamously argued that:

Class is not just about the way you talk, or dress, or furnish your home; it is not just about the job you do or how much money you make doing it; nor is it merely about whether or not you went to university, nor which university you went to. Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your

psyche, at the very core of your being. In the all-encompassing English class system, if you know that you are in the ‘wrong’ class, you know that therefore you are a valueless person (Kuhn 1995: 98)

Typology 2: Class Drifter(s)

Unlike, class anchors, class drifter endure acute ambivalence when seeking to elucidate whether they feel that their class identity is being re-fashioned as a result of their academic success at the elite Stellar University. Just as the name suggests, class drifters oscillate between identifying themselves as being working-class and as a prospective member of the middle classes. It seems that they are unable to definitively conclude as to whether they feel that attendance at an elite university will result them embarking on a trajectory of social mobility and thus their class positioning changing. Class drifters espoused the conception that they were whilst they were not really working-class they were not anything other’. Interestingly, as the below extract from Jodie alludes to, social class for class-drifters tended to be conceptualised within a Weberian paradigm, although participants do not speak explicitly in terms of an ‘Weberian understandings of social-class’. Instead, participants explicitly defined social class in relation to one’s job, the subsequent honour, status and prestige that said job yields in addition to one’s material acquisition and economic capital. The possession of property, home ownership, disposable income and the alike for example was central to the way in which class drifters conceptualised social class. It is in this vein that class drifters envisage, to some extent class refashioning as being an ‘inevitable’ consequence of working-class academic success and elite university attendance.

However, class drifters experienced and conceptualised social class in contradictory, conflicting and confusing ways. Class drifters exhibited much self-reflexivity acknowledging the instability of their position within social space. Social class, for class drifters was seldom experienced as something that was stable, secure and given. Class drifters acknowledged the fluctuating nature of their current and future position in social space and so they did not see themselves as being an endemic member of one class nor the next. The class-drifters of this study experienced class ambivalence as a seemingly fragile and emotional state of being, they were “marginal members of two cultural worlds” (Gardner 1993:55). The below extract from Jodie captures the central tenets underpinning a class drifter’s conceptualization of social class:

Well yeh I guess so, I mean I’m going to work as a lawyer and you wouldn’t call them working-class. I’m going to live in a nice house, drive a nice car, have quite a powerful job, high disposable income. I don’t think I could call myself working-class, because I won’t be working in Sainsbury’s or stuff like that you know, I won’t be struggling to pay the bills. But then again I’ve not been born into that way, into that world. But I would have earned it I guess, I dunno it’s complicated isn’t it.

Typology 3: Class Bespoke(s)

Throughout the interviews a number of respondents evoked a powerful narrative of working-class consciousness whilst simultaneously evidencing a hesitancy to label themselves as being working-class. Such hesitancy was underpinned by a reflexive realisation and acknowledgement that much of what it meant to be working-class in twenty-first century austerity Britain stood in stark contrast to that which characterized

their daily experience of study and at elite university and their probable future daily life. As I have discussed within the prologue, food poverty, a lack of affordable housing, a shrinking labour market, the pervasive and rampant rise in zero-hour contracts, the proliferation of low paid work alongside the privatization of the National Health Service and the national education system are just some of the issues that affect the everyday lives of the working classes in ways that are all pervasive (Dorling 2014, 2015, Garthwaite 2017, 2016; Reay 2017; McKenzie 2015). However, living out the contemporary social ills of the time were experiences and struggles that participants envisaged as being omitted from their futures as a result of their elite university attendance. Class bespokes were acutely aware of the relatively privileged positions that they occupied and it was in this vein that whilst class bespokes espoused a working-class consciousness a working-class social position was one in which they were hesitant to claim as exemplified by Rebecca and Lewis.

Rebecca: I'm working-class but it just feels odd to describe myself as being working-class when my daily experiences aren't like the rest of my mates, like I don't struggle you know?

Lewis: I'd like to think that I won't struggle to pay the bills, to put food on the table or be out of work when I'm older. Like all of the bad things that my friends and family are facing. So does that then mean I'm not working-class? I don't know myself, I certainly don't feel middle-class.

Within the above extrapolated quotations participants evidence the awareness that their current, and indeed future social world will be markedly different to those individuals who they had grown up with. Class bespoke evidence significant ambivalence and uncertainty regarding their social class positioning. Whilst they do not attempt to make the definitive claim that they are working-class at the same time they are not comfortable ‘labelling’ themselves middle-class either. Class bespoke were acutely aware and highly critical of dominant discourses of social mobility that currently position working-class and something from which one must aspire to escape from and leave behind. This is evident within the quote from Priya who, when reflecting upon the possibility of social mobility through elite university tells me that:

It's just about saying if your successful then you can label yourself middle-class and if you're not well then you're working-class, no thanks. You can be working-class and educated, you can be working-class and have money, sure you won't have as many limitations but inside you're the same, culturally the same, more or less anyway. I guess, if anything you could say you're creating a unique version of being working-class.

Permeating class bespoke narratives was the implicit hope that their academic success and subsequent attendance at an elite university would result in them embarking on careers that have traditionally been the preserve of the middle classes. Yet absent from such accounts were expectations of a seamless transition from working to middle-class social position; such transition was not one which participants expected nor desired. Perhaps, in part due to the notion that “not being middle class is certainly valued in many working-class social groups” (Skeggs 1997:11). The

complexity and experiential level of being working-class and educationally successful and the subsequent ambivalence that surrounds one's ontological class positioning pervades the writings and research of many working-class born women working within academia (Hey 1997; Ingram 2018; Kuhn 1995; Maguire 1997; Mahony and Zmroczek 1997; Plummer 2000; Skeggs 1997; Steedman 1986; Walkerdine 2017; Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Such complexity is no more succinctly yet eloquently captured in the writing of Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek when, within their introduction to *Class Matters: 'Working-class' Women's Perspectives on Social Class* reflect that:

As two women from working-class backgrounds, the experience of going through university as students and then as working in the academy as teachers and researchers left us confused about our own class positioning. Though both of us were told repeatedly that by virtue of our education and our 'position in the labour market' we were not working-class, we did not feel middle-class not believe that we had necessarily 'gone up in the world'. Whilst we believed it was insulting to other working-class people to pretend that by our middle-class occupations, neither did we feel that we inhabited the world of the university in the same way as the majority of our colleagues (including other feminists). In addition, the social and cultural assumptions underpinning and permeating some of our worlds seemed to be very different from those of our middle-class feminist colleagues and friends (Mahony and Zmroczek 1997:1).

Typology 4: Class Abandoner(s)

Who would want to be seen as working class? (Possibly only academics are left) (Skeggs 1997: 95)

Class abandoners, just as the women of Skeggs (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender* sought to dis-identify from a working-class position. However, more than simply dis-identifying from being working-class, class abandoners envisaged their class positioning changing or having already changed as a result of their attendance at the elite University of Stellar. Just as the university educated female participants of Lawler's (1999) study who were born into working-class families but who now define themselves as middle-class, class abandoners evidenced a fantasy of "getting out and getting away" (Lawler 1999: 19) from their working-class background. At the heart of class abandoners understanding of social class and social mobility lay "the desire to flee one's working-class upbringing... escaping one's past" (Friedman 2014: 359). Class abandoners tended to espouse the discourse of meritocracy when reflecting upon their educational 'success'. Just as the British undergraduate students at an elite UK university of Warikoo's (2014, 2016) research it was not uncommon for class abandoners to explain their trajectory to and through the elite Stellar University through discourses of merit, hard work, talent and ability. Interestingly, the underrepresentation of working-class, and BME students was often (though not always) explained through a lack of will and ambition coupled with the devaluing of education within such social groups as opposed to historical and structural inequalities inherent within the British education system. Such comments were reminiscent of deficit discourses that have long constructed working-class and BME students as being educationally apathetic at best and in stark opposition to the values of education at worst. However, not all class abandoners thought in such a way. Some simply and optimistically bought into contemporary dominant discourses of social mobility that

were, and continue to circulate in lay, popular and political rhetoric. There was no evidence to suggest that, unlike the working-class born students and employees of higher education of Loveday's research, that "interaction with middle-class professionals and peers in HE had largely left them feeling more working class" (2015: 582). It is perhaps unsurprising that becoming middle-class is an aspiration for which the minority of participants aspired to and in this vein class abandoners believe in and perceive social mobility as a result of their formal elite university education as a desirable ideal and one that they strived for. However, there are costs involved in subscribing to such discourse of social mobility. As Diane Reay (2013: 666-667) argues:

Embedded in the myth of social mobility is a further myth that we can all become middle class (or, at its most fantastical, very rich). Such fantasies estrange the working classes from any sense of personal worth or feelings of value if they remain as they are (Reay 2006) [...] social mobility is a wrenching process. It rips working-class young people out of communities that need to hold on to them, and it rips valuable aspects of self out of the socially mobile themselves as they are forced to discard qualities and dispositions that do not accord with the dominant middleclass culture that is increasingly characterized by selfish individualism and hyper-competition.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the effects of elite university attendance upon participants' relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' working-class siblings and romantic partners paying particular attention to the emotions aroused for all and to the

gendered intersections of such experience(s). It has been shown that participants, as a result of their attendance at Stellar University can at times, be the object of competition and envy among those closest to them; and that their experience of educational success is wrought with gendered losses and gains. Strikingly, this chapter has shown that for the female participants of this study elite university attendance had implications upon their imagined futures with their romantic partners. Specifically, as a result of participant's motivation for putting 'family first' hegemonic (hetero)-presumptions of family life and gender roles in in female participant's imagined futures were elicited that were not welcomed by their partners; subsequently calling into question the longevity of current romantic relationships as well as future ones with 'non-educationally mobile' working-class individuals. This chapter was drawn to a conclusion by exploring the ways in which participants of this study conceptualized social-class; the extent to which participants perceive social mobility through formal education a) as being possible b) and a desirable ideal that they strive for. It therefore proposed a four-tiered typology regarding the various ways in which the working-class, first-generation students conceptualise social class and social mobility as a result of their educational success by way of their attendance at the elite, Stellar University thus contributing to sociological debates pertaining to social-class, social mobility and the role of elite education (and education per se) as a contributor to social mobility.

Thesis Conclusion

In the former body of this thesis, throughout the three substantive chapters presented I have explored three lines of sociological enquiry that has arisen, in the initial instance, from my own trajectory to and through higher education and then arising from the existing body of literature. This thesis has three lines of sociological enquiry. These were the experiences of working-class, first-generation students at an elite university, the effects of elite university attendance upon relationships with ones 'non-educationally mobile' family, friends and romantic relations and the perspective of working-class, first-generation elite university students' perceptions of social class and social mobility. As such, this conclusion draws together these analytic threads so as to paint a fuller picture of the pleasure pains and possibilities underpinning the twenty-seven participants' experiences of being a working-class student at an elite university. Before setting out the substantive conclusions and contributions of this work I find it necessary to revisit the research questions.

Revisiting the Research Questions

This research sought to consider the three following research questions:

1. What are the everyday lived experiences of working-class students at an elite university? In what ways are such experiences gendered and if possible to say, raced?
2. What is the effect of attendance at an elite university upon ties and relationships with friends and family from the student's home community?
3. In what ways do working-class students at an elite university understand and narrate their classed identity; do participants perceive social mobility through formal education a) as being possible, and b) as a desirable ideal and one that they strive for?

The aim of this thesis was to illuminate the experiences of working-class individuals who experience educational success by way of elite university attendance, paying attention to the way in which their experiences were gendered and to a latter extent, if possible, raced. The second aim of this research sought to explore the ways in which working-class students at an elite university understand and narrate their classed identity and possible social mobility.

Substantive Findings, Discussion, Implications and Directions for Future Research

This concluding discussion will now move forward in order to draw together the a) threads of analysis and discussion set out the thesis core arguments and in seeking to discuss the implications of this thesis upon future research directions within the field. In doing so, I will provide a summary of the arguments and functions of each chapters proving a synthesized overview of the overarching

arguments that each chapter supports and builds up to whilst also setting out areas for future research.

The first research question asked; What are the everyday lived experiences of working-class students at an elite university? In what ways are such experiences gendered, and, if possible raced? The data from this study makes one headline conclusion clear, racism and classism on campus prevails and shapes participants' everyday experiences of Stellar University in profound ways. Discrimination and prejudice within universities is not a novel phenomenon and at present campus culture in both the UK and USA has been accorded a barrage of scholarly lay and media attention (Solorzano et al., 2000; Peters 2015; Warikoo 2016; Frazer-Carroll 2018; Nagdee 2018). However, much of the discussion pertaining to campus culture relates to issue of sexism, this work *is* most pressing, I do not wish to deny nor downplay that. However, what I do want to do is cast light on the way in which racism and classism is at the very heart of the higher education institutions be it within the credentialed curriculum or among the student body. It is alarming that there exists no comparable noise or outrage at the racism and classism that pervade campus cultures; classism, especially, is characterised by a dearth of commentary despite much noise from the student community through mainstream and student press outlets (Gevertz 2014; Arkley 2018; Brown 2017; Kennedy 2018; Noor 2018).

Within this thesis I have illuminated some of the racist and classist acts that participants were often subject to in ways that are both mundane and overt. I have highlighted various ways in which race, racism, class and classism operated on campus and of the various ways in which participants navigated university

amidst a background of stereotypes and misrecognitions. For example, the inclusion and perpetuation of negative stereotypes relating to class, ethnicity place and space within lectures and course readings; being mistaken for ‘locals’, trying to ‘crash’ student events; and even being accused of lying about their student status in order to romantically impress others to give just three examples. Importantly, I have highlighted the way in which welfare, poverty and place compound participants’ experiences of Stellar University and in doing so is one of the first studies, if not *the* first within contemporary British sociology to sociologically hone in on the way in which welfare, poverty and place shape working-class students’ experiences of being at an elite university. As the data shows, accent and language impacted profoundly upon the everyday lived experience of being a working-class first-generation student at Stellar University with the politics of belonging at elite universities evoked when participants’ middle-class peers questioned their academic ability as a result of their working-class accents.

Whilst students themselves are forming and growing communities to name and shame racism and classism on campus, to express their communal disaffection and to call for action, I argue that they shouldn’t have to. This is the responsibility of university governance not of students themselves. There is, however, cause for *slight* celebration, the racism that currently emanates from British universities *is* coming to light. However, the increasing visibility of racism within UK universities is the result and outcome of impassioned student *and* staff whistle-blowers (Brown 2017; Ferguson 2018 and Frazer-Carroll 2018; Gevertz 2014) rather than universities themselves. Classism, in contrast, remains largely omitted from collective campus social justice campaigns. Much debate

and discussion *is* happening with regards to racism and classism on campus and sociological research needs to attend to this. Being called “*fucking common scum*”, being asked “*Isn’t that where people get mugged*” when you inform a fellow peer where you live and being the subject of banter because of your class background meant that you received free school meals should not be part of the experiences of working-class students at elite universities, or at university *per se*. Thus, sociological research needs to hold to account those persons that wish to grow the population of the student body without ensuring that it grows to be an inclusive one. Moreover, in this same vein, with regards to ‘inclusivity’ I suggest that sociological research needs to further attend to what inclusivity within higher education means for the very students of which it is seeking to include. The comments of Daisha in chapter three suggests that she perceives the images of students from ethnic minority and non-traditional backgrounds that appear across the university promotional material to be tokenistic to the BME population. Although tentative, this is most interesting and sociological research needs to further explore as to whether other students from BME hold such perception and the implications upon where prospective BME students choose to attend. Finally, in light of the aforementioned Sociologists need to ask, ‘what can be done?’, especially so in light of the BME attainment gap (Bouattia 2015). The above suggestions are by no means conclusive ones. Rather, they are the start of a wider ongoing attention that needs to be paid to ‘the student experience’.

The second research question asked; What is the effect of attendance at an elite university upon ties and relationships with friends and family from the student’s home community? This question was grappled in both chapter four *‘Elite University Attendance and Changing Relations: Family, Friends and the*

Self” and chapter five ‘*Sibling Rivalry and Romantic Rifts, the Pains and Possibilities of Elite University Attendance and Participants’ Perceptions of Social Class and Social Mobility*’. In chapter four, this thesis recognizes that the effects of educational success for working-class persons are felt, to echo a phrase from Ingram, both “within school and beyond the gate” (Ingram 2011: 287). This chapter argues that participants’ reluctance to envisage academic work as equating ‘hard’ work alongside academic feelings of imposterism and fraudulence that pervaded and coloured the participants’ experience of studying at Stellar University alongside participants’ time poverty, lack of economic capital *and* their acquirement of new cultural capital more aligned with the middle-classes contributed, at times, to the breakdown of connections with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and family at times. Such findings are insightful and point to a novel area of sociological enquiry as a result of the neoliberal university and neoliberalism per se. Bourdieu’s metaphorical framework of capitals has been drawn upon by sociologists of education to explore the way in which students in higher education mobilize their social, cultural and economic capital in order to gain positional advantage upon graduation (Bathmaker et al., 2014). However, it was an unexpected finding of this thesis that Bourdieu’s metaphorical framework of capitals played out within the personal lives of the working-class, first-generation participants of this study in such a way that, at times, served as a barrier to them impeding their ability to maintain connections with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends, family and romantic partners. Where participants did acquire new cultural capital as a result of their elite university attendance it often contributed to the breakdown of connections with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends and family at times, for example the acquirement of new language. In addition, a surprising but stark finding relates to that of imposterism. Participants spoke at length about the

congested graduate labour market and of the need to obtain a high classification owing to the fact that other rules of the game were not within their reach. The need to achieve high grades coupled with feelings of imposterism served to preclude participants from maintaining connections with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends owing to the sheer amount of time participants felt compelled to devote to studying owing to said feelings. Imposterism and its associated feelings of fraudulence are presently on the sociological agenda (Breeze 2018). However, similar to that of working-class educationally success, much of this work written informing contemporary conversations pertaining to imposterism derives from academics, be it at the doctoral or professorial level (Sparkes 2007; Gill 2010; Clarke 2014; Loveday 2017). Therefore, future research should explore the effects of the neoliberal university upon working-class and other non-traditional student groups thereby elucidating the changing nature of class (in)equality within higher education.

With regards to the effects of elite university attendance upon the working-class participants’ relationships with their ‘non-educationally mobile’ siblings and romantic partner this chapter argues that such finding was a gendered one demonstrating that the costs of educational success were greater for the female participants of this study. Specifically, this chapter has argued that despite the possibility of progressing into higher paid jobs than their ‘non-educationally mobile’ partners the female participants of this study found that their partners did not welcome the possible reversal of traditional gender roles within ‘the family’. In light of recent research by Roberts (2018) that demonstrates, and in doing so contrasts to this thesis findings that working-class men *are* willing to engage with housework and childcare future sociological research should explore the extent to which the ideals expressed by the working-class, first-

generation students of this study reconfigure over time and, if so, for what reasons.

With regards to the effects of elite university attendance upon the working-class participants' relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' siblings and romantic partners this chapter argues that the data reveals that participants, as a result of their attendance at Stellar University can at times, be the object of competition and envy among those that they choose to be in loving relationship with or that they share kinship with and that their experience of educational success is wrought with gendered losses *and* gains (no matter how tentative) as a result. An illuminating future areas of enquiry would be to explore the way in which the effects of elite university attendance upon relationships' with 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family play out over the life course. Do such relations gain strength? Or are bonds broken?

Elite universities and universities per se are places and spaces that have historically been and continue to be the domain of the middle classes. To quote a recent tweet by McKenzie "we are 'left out' not left behind. By design not accident" (McKenzie 2019). As I have discussed, those working-class persons who find themselves occupying the space of the elite university be it from the position of student or academic have written of the constrain and alienation that they face as a result. However, as the participant's narratives of this study revealed, the relationship between the middle-class field of the elite university and one's working-class home life is complex for the elite university can also be a liberating experience and a space where ones is able to develop aspects of themselves that had not previously been available to them within their working-class fields of origin. For example, for a small subsection of female participants who were in romantic relationships with 'non-educationally' mobile others

attendance at the elite Stellar University was, in various ways, a liberating one. Attendance at Stellar University provided them with the space and scope to find agency from oppressive heterosexual relationships and at times, limiting gender roles and it is these pleasures and possibilities and the complex ways in which the elite university is experienced by working-class students should not be dismissed nor downplayed.

Finally, the third research question asked; in what ways do working-class students at an elite university understand and narrate their classed identity; do participants perceive social mobility through formal education a) as being possible, and b) as a desirable ideal and one that they strive for? This question was addressed within the latter body of chapter five which was entitled '*Sibling Rivalry and Romantic Rifts, the Pains and Possibilities of Elite University Attendance and Participants' Perceptions of Social Class and Social Mobility*'. In order to elucidate the way in which participants understood and narrated their class identity and issues of social mobility this chapter proposed a four-tiered typology regarding the various ways in which the working-class, first-generation students conceptualize social class and social mobility as a result of their educational success by way of their attendance at the elite, Stellar University. This four-tiered typology encompasses the typologies of class anchors, class drifters, class bespoke and class abandoners in order to capture the subjective understanding of social class and social mobility from the participants of this study. It is in this vein that this thesis contributes to sociological debates pertaining to social-class, social mobility and the role of elite education (and education per se) as a possible contributor to social mobility and the extent to which social mobility is both a desired *and* actual outcome of higher education.

The work of Laurison et al. (2016) and Bradley and Waller (2018) has sought to explore classed transition to and through the world of work and future which has highlighted the persistence of class inequality within the labour market. It is in this vein that sociological research should continue to explore the role of higher education in reproducing or reducing social inequality. Who is getting ahead? Who is not? What can be done?

Limitations of the Research

With regards to the limitations of this thesis, I acknowledge that there are limitations in relation to the discussion of the relationship between race and class in the analytical chapters. For example, it could be argued that chapter three aligns race and class in a way that creates the problematic impression that BME students *are all* working class, and that racism comes only or primarily, from middle or upper class people. This, however, was not my intention when writing up the thesis, but rather a consequence my focus upon and commitment to exploring the university experiences of *working-class* students. Thus, it therefore follows that all of the BME students of this thesis are working-class and that the racism and classism that I hone in on throughout chapter three derived from participant's middle-class university peers. However, I acknowledge that the participants of this study are entangled in different power relations, and that not all not all BME students are working-class, moreover I also recognise that racism is not solely the preserve of middle or upper middle class persons and that racism can indeed be exhibited from working-class persons. As the recent work of Bhambra (2017) highlights, racism was a core component of the Brexit referendum within Britain. However, throughout this research there was no data that evidenced ways in which the working-class participants of this study exhibited racist beliefs or behaviours and as such did not form as part of the

analysis and discussions throughout the findings chapters. Similarly, throughout this research there was no data that evidenced ways in which the working-class participants of this study exhibited sexist beliefs or behaviours thus it's omission from this thesis. Nevertheless, it should be noted that I did not explicitly ask questions that probed the issues of sexism on campus or of the ways in which participants felt that they benefitted (or not) from their gender.

I understand that the way in which chapter three could create the impression that all BME students are all working-class and that racism comes only or primarily from the middle or upper class people *and* I recognise that this is problematic for namely two reasons. The first, is that the BME participants are treated in the study in a more racialized way than other participants within this study. Secondly, I acknowledged that in relation to chapters four and five there is the implicit assumption that assumes a white 'working-classness'. Both of these critiques can be explained, much to my regret by the fact that I did not explicitly ask participants about race as part of my interviews. For example, I asked participants "has there ever been an incident here on campus where you felt your class position caused you to be left out, put down, dismissed, or discriminated against?" but I did not ask them this question in relation to race. Thus it was only when participants brought up issues and instances of being working-class at Stellar University that related to their race was data generated. As a consequence, a number of analytical blind spots emerged. For example, I do not analyse or reflect upon the way in which the white working-class participants of this study benefitted from their whiteness or of the way in which white-privilege worked for said participants, nor do I analyse the way in which, for example, class and race shapes participants experience of elite university attendance and the effects of this upon their changing relations with family, friends and romantic partners.

Consequently, my analysis foregrounds issues of social class although it should be noted that this was my intention. Nonetheless, whilst the participants that make up this ethnography are overwhelmingly white, white is still a racial category and so, inherently there is scope for a raced analysis here. In seeking to critically reflect on this I wish to cite Pereira when, reflecting on her “ethnographic and interview data on scientific boundary-work in the natural and social sciences in Portugal” (Pereira 2019: 338) and discussing the fact that “no participants explicitly addressed the impact of race, ethnicity, class, (dis)ability, or gender identity on the success of their boundary-work” (Pereira 2019: 350) writes that:

There is no doubt that structural inequalities relating to race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, and (dis)ability shape access to, and experiences of, academic careers in Portugal (Fontes et al. 2014; Machado et al. 1995; Maeso and Araujo 2014). Therefore, that silence says more about the invisibility of these inequalities to those— including me—who are privileged vis-à-vis them (Ahmed 2007) than it does about their actual influence on experiences of boundary-work.

There exists a rich illuminating body of research that elucidates the various in ways in which race shapes access to and journeys through higher education and of the daily experience of BME staff and students within higher education (eg. Gillborn, 2008; Madood 2012; Burke 2015; Boliver, 2016). As I have discussed in chapter three, the contemporary university is one marked by the legacy of colonialism and continues to reproduce race privilege (Arday and Mirza 2018). Gillborn (2008; 2010) has argued that by focusing on the white working-classes inequalities of race are overlooked thereby contributing to white supremacy. As

the title of this thesis conveys (*Pleasure, Pain and Possibilities: An Ethnography of Working-Class Students at an Elite University*) the primary focus of this thesis was upon the way in which the majority of the participants of this study experienced elite university attendance in relation to their *working-class positioning* and not that of race or gender (although these intersections are discussed to differing degrees). Recognising the work of Gillborn (2008; 2010) I wish to make it known that it was not my aim to further fuel white supremacy and as such I recognise and acknowledge that the white participants of my thesis were nonetheless in a privileged position in terms of their race (in addition to myriad other privileges i.e. geopolitics) even when I do not explicitly state so.

Furthermore, within chapter four '*Elite University Attendance and Changing Relations: Family, Friends and the Self*' I explored the effects of elite university attendance on participants' relationships with their 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family. In doing so, I attended to the way in which imposter syndrome, temporal constraints, the lack of economic capital and participants' acquirement of new cultural capital effects their relationships and connection(s) to their working-class 'non-educationally mobile' friends and family. To do so, I drew upon Bourdieu's theoretical tools of social, cultural and economic capital in order to explore, sociologically, what the working-class participants of my thesis gained or lost as a result of their elite university attendance. I recognise that throughout this thesis, when discussing the various ways in which participants felt distant or different from their working-class communities that this is implicitly or explicitly framed as primarily a negative thing; that it is marked by loss, sadness, pain, isolation and alienation. Thus I recognise that this reads to be a very negative and somewhat pessimistic understanding of the experiences of the participants of this study. However, this is in part explained

because of the Bourdieusian framework that has directed this thesis. Reflecting upon the use of Bourdieusian social theory by educational researchers James argues that a Bourdieusian “approach can produce a pessimistic account that is at odds with some educational values” (James 2015: 97). James continues to argue that a Bourdieusian “approach can provide great insight, its tendency to produce a pessimism may dampen some of the enthusiasm that is so often a fundamental constituent of educational endeavour” (James 2015: 109).

Nonetheless, this thesis does recognise the various ways in which attendance at Stellar University can be a pleasurable experience and at times an experience by which participants differentiate themselves from their working-class communities either intentionally or unintentionally. For example, in chapter four Lucy discusses the way in which attendance at Stellar University has resulted in the acquirement of novel cultural capital, namely through her discussion regarding her new found desire to discuss current affairs. Lucy compares the discussion pertaining to current affairs at Stellar University as being “*informative, more educational*” compared to what she describes as the “*nonsense*” talk that she would have “*back home*” with her ‘non-educationally mobile’ peers. It is here that we witness the way in which Lucy demonstrates one way in which she has changed since attending Stellar University and of the pleasure that this brings. It could be read that Lucy is attempting to show off how far she has travelled socially. However, the data in this thesis presents a far more complex picture of participants simply showing off what they have achieved and how far they have travelled in social space. It is when Lucy makes the remark that whilst she enjoys such conversations she often feels fraudulent partaking in such conversations as is suggested when she tells me “*I feel like that I am not as*

educated as they are in some kind of things” we catch a glimpse of the uncomfortableness of neither fitting in seamlessly in a working or middle class field, and thus of the pain that accompanies the pleasure of attending an elite university and all that it entails.

Elite university attendance can and did bring about changes that the participants were positive about as previously discussed within this conclusion. I do not wish deny or overlook this. It is simply that my data showed that such changes, such gains, albeit positive, also went hand in hand with a loss of a connection to working-class social network, to their working-class community and friends. Thus, it is this complex mix of pleasure, pain and possibilities that working-class students at an elite university finds themselves navigating that this thesis is committed to conveying and as such may read, at times to be a pessimistic read.

Conclusion

This thesis has provided a window into the experiences of how working-class, first-generation undergraduate students experience elite university attendance both on and off campus, the effect of this upon their relationships with ‘non-educationally mobile’ friends, family and romantic partners and of the perceived implications of elite university education upon their social class positioning. At the crux of this thesis lay the pleasure, the pain and the possibilities that pervaded the narratives of the twenty-seven participants of this ethnography.

In attempting to begin writing this conclusion my mind went black and my fingers froze. Writing this thesis conclusion was somewhat of a daunting

experience, questions such as where do I begin? and what's the best approach? often occupied my mind long before the time came to put pen to paper. Consequently, over the past year or so, and more recently when writing this conclusion, I have spent much time conversing with my fellow doctoral peers as well as established academics as to what should be included and how. I have consulted myriad how to guides, I have glanced over the conclusions of my doctoral peers and I have, right now at this moment, a thesis introduction and conclusion pro forma to the right of me on my desk. Of this advice I am told that, within the conclusion one must "give a summary of the arguments", present the "functions of each chapter", "return to the literature lacuna" and "state the implications for future research". However, as I have alluded to within the prologue of this thesis, the words on the pages that have come before now are more than arguments to be made, and conclusions to be drawn and future research agendas to be identified. They are personal stories to be told and I hope that I have sufficiently done so in a way that honestly and eloquently conveys the pleasures, the pains and possibilities that elite university attendance brings for working-class, first-generation students...

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Appendices

1 – Participant Biographies

Amy

Amy is White female social sciences student; Amy was raised by her mum and received social security growing up. She attended Stellar University straight from her school sixth form completing A-Levels.

Aron

Aron is a White male student, his parents were homeowners and he was studying for a degree in mathematics.

Ben

Ben is a White male student; he was a recipient of social security, lived in social housing accommodation growing up and received free school meals at school. Stellar University was his first choice of university and he enjoyed academic study. He was studying for a degree in the mechanical sciences.

Callum

Callum is a White male student local student who has lived in the city all his life. His parents own their own home; he considered studying at Stellar University after a school teacher encouraged him to apply, he studied mechanical sciences.

Cassie

Cassie is a White female student whose parents own their own home. Her mother and father both work full time as such she does not qualify for an extra financial support from the university. She is an only child.

Daisha

Daisha is a Black British female and a political sciences student. She was raised on social security and lived in social housing. She is the only one of her siblings to attend university. At the time of our initial interview, Daisha was in her final year of study. She graduated with a 2.1.

Daniel

Daniel is a White male local student studying the natural sciences. Throughout the interviews and preliminary questionnaire, Daniel did not inform of as to whether his parents owned their own home or whether he was a recipient of social security, however Daniel was in receipt of a Stellar University bursary. Daniel is dyslexic but wasn't tested until he was 18 just a few months before his last A-level exams. As Daniel tells me, *"I didn't do so well in my A-levels the first time around so I worked for a couple of years before going back to education (with a better approach) and, obviously, doing a little better and getting into university"*. Upon completing his degree, Daniel thought he would *"walk straight into research or something"* and informed me that whilst he had had *"loads of interviews and done over two hundred application"* he had unfortunately, *"not got anything solid"*. Instead, Daniel spent his time completing odd DIY jobs around the home for family and friends, as Daniel himself told me *"been filling my time between doing odd jobs for family, then friends of family and friends of friends of family! So at least I haven't been idle. Done everything from redecorating houses to laying slabs in a garden...not really something you need a masters in physics for though"*.

Dean

Dean is a White male student studying an arts degree, he is an only child and his parents own their own home. Dean attended Stellar University after completing his A-Levels at his secondary school sixth form.

Duncan

Duncan is a Black British male; he has two older sisters, one of whom had graduated and the other was currently still a student. Both of his sisters attended Russell Group Universities. For his secondary education, Duncan attended, as he himself tells me “*a good school*”, although he repeated his final year of his A-Levels. Duncan grew up with his mother and father, although his mother is in work now he was formerly a recipient of social security growing up and free school meals at school.

Faith

Faith is Black British female and humanities student. She was raised on social security and received a Stellar University bursary. She attended Stellar University straight from her school sixth form completing A-Levels.

Jack

Jack is a White male student; he is the only one in his family and the only one out of his siblings to attend university, he received at Stellar University bursary. Growing up Jack was a recipient of social security and free school meals. At the age of 14 Jack was “*taken out of mainstream education*” by his secondary school and therefore attended a secondary support centre, which he described as being “pretty shit”. Jack described himself as being an “*asshole*”; “*disruptive*”; and “*basically a terrible student*” in his

mainstream secondary school and noted that whilst he started school in top set, he was moved down sets for his bad behaviour until he was in the bottom set. Although Jack wanted to study for GCSE's his support centre enrolled him on a brick-laying course at college. Following this, he attended university after a number of years working in bars; he returned to college to sit his GCSEs and later gained entry to Stellar University to study English Literature. At 20, he was diagnosed with dyslexia, just after sitting his GCSE's at college. Unfortunately, Jack did not finish his degree, as Jack told me in 2018, through Facebook:

“I never actually managed to finish uni in the end. They stopped my student finance so I had to stop half way through the year. But I like my new job and it pays well over summer at least. Maybe I'll try and save up and finish it but I'm to that bothered now. At the time I was upset but was a while ago now. I didn't really decide. It was for medical reasons so I thought it would be fine but half way through the year I got kicked out coz they refused to pay the tuition fees. But it's all good now. Maybe I'll save up and pay it myself and then I can finish.”

Jamie

Jamie is a White male student. It is unclear as to whether Jamie received social welfare, or if his parent owned or rented their home. At the time of our interview, Jamie had a girlfriend from his home's locale; his girlfriend was not in further or higher education but was working full time.

Jane

Jane is a White female student. Her parents own their own home. The secondary school that she attended underperformed and she tells me that she was the only one out of her friends to progress to study at university. Jane has a boyfriend from her home locale who was not in further or higher education but who works fulltime.

Jasmin

Jasmin is a British Asian female student. Her parents own their own home. She has two siblings, one younger and one older. Her older sibling does not attend university but Jasmin is hoping that her younger sibling will attend university. She has a number of cousins, none of whom she informs me attend nor wish to attend university.

Jessica

Jessica is a White female student from Essex, her parents own their own home.

Jodie

Jodie is a White female student; her parents own their own home. Jodie studied for A-Levels and then went straight into university. She studied Law at Stella University and at the time of the interview stated that she planned to peruse a career in Law upon graduation.

Joe

Joe is white male student; he lives in social housing and received social security growing up. He studied Maths at Stellar University and at the time of our interview did not know what he wanted to pursue after graduation.

Katie

Katie is a White female student, growing up her family received social security and she lived in a social housing. Katie was in receipt of a Stella University bursary.

Lewis

Lewis is a White male student studying a humanities subject. His was raised by his single mum, growing up he received social security benefits and he has a younger brother. At the time of fieldwork, Lewis was in a relationship with a female from his home locale. Lewis's girlfriend was not in further or higher education and instead worked full time.

Lucy

Lucy is a White female student studying a natural science subject. She is an only child and her parents own their own home. Lucy was in receipt of free school meals during her time studying for her A-Levels and a Stellar University bursary.

Luke

Luke is a White male student local to the area; he is one of five children and the only one in his family to attend university. He was raised on social security, grew up in social housing and was a recipient of free school meals. Luke received a Stellar University bursary. He dropped out of education early on in his secondary schooling leaving with no formal qualifications, he returned to education studying for an access to higher education programme at college and then attend Stellar University. In his final year at university he was nominated for a student award, secured a graduate job and was due to move in with his girlfriend who he had met at Stellar University.

Priya

Priya is a British Asian female student; her parents owned their own home although she did note that “*growing up money was so tight*”, Priya was in receipt of a Stellar University bursary. At Stellar University Priya studied the humanities.

Rebecca

Rebecca is a White female student, it was not clear whether she her parents owned their own home or not, nor if she were raised on social security or not. Rebecca was in a relationship with a male from her home locale. Rebecca’s boyfriend was not in further or higher education. Rebecca was studying in the business school at Stellar University.

Robert

Robert is a White male student; he was raised on social security and grew up in social housing. Stellar University was his first choice of university and upon graduating Robert secured himself a graduate job. At the time of our initial interview, Robert was in his second year as a full time student.

Scarlett

Scarlett is a White female student local to the area. She is a mum of two boys, she was a late teenager when her sons were born. Whilst Scarlett was in a relationship with her sons farther when she begun studying at Stellar University her relationship broke down. Scarlett was thus a single mum and full time student when I interviewed her raising her sons on social security. Scarlett graduated with a 2.1 in social sciences.

Sophie

Sophie is a White female student, her parents own their own home and she studied the arts at Stellar University.

Steve

Steve is a White male student local to the area. He is the youngest of three siblings and the only one in his family to attend university. He was raised on social security, grew up in social housing, was a recipient of free school meals and attended an Ofsted 'special measures' secondary school. After a number of years of precarious employment, Steve returned to education completing an access to higher education programme at college, attended university and later graduate with a first-class degree in a mechanical sciences subject. Whilst at Stellar University Steve received a Stella University bursary.

2 – Table 2 – Participant Research Method Table

Name	Race	Gender	Initial Interview	Follow up interviews	Interviews with family / friends	Photo elicitation	Walking Tour	Driving Tour
Amy	White	Female	X	X	X	X	X	X
Aron	White	Male	X					
Ben	White	Male	X	X	X	X		
Callum	White	Male	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cassie	White	Female	X					
Daisha	Black British	Female	X	X		X		
Daniel	White	Male	X	X		X		
Dean	White	Male	X					
Duncan	Black British	Male	X					
Faith	Black British	Female	X	X		X		
Jack	White	Male	X	X				
Jamie	White	Male	X					
Jane	White	Female	X	X		X	X	
Jasmin	British Asian	Female	X	X		X	X	
Jessica	White	Female	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jodie	White	Female	X					
Joe	White	Male	X					
Katie	White	Female	X	X		X		

Lewis	White	Male	X	X		X		
Lucy	White	Female	X	X		X		
Luke	White	Male	X	X	X			
Priya	British Asian	Female	X					
Rebecca	White	Female	X					
Robert	White	Male	X	X		X		
Scarlett	White	Female	X					
Sophie	White	Female	X					
Steve	White	Male	X	X	X			

3 - Project Participant Information Sheet

Title of Research

Working-class, first-generation students' experiences of being at an elite university.

Description of the Research and Who I am

I am a doctoral researcher from the department of Sociology at the University of Warwick interested in the experiences of first-generation* working-class students. I am a first-generation working-class student who is 24 years of age. As part of my doctoral research I am conducting ethnographic (where researchers observe and/or interact with a study's participants in their real-life environment) research into the university experiences of first-generation, working-class students' at [name of university].

As part of my doctoral research I am conducting observations of university open days and various social events at [name of university]. In addition, I hope to conduct research with working-class, first-generation students through a variety of research methods (photo elicitation, walking tours, driving tours etc.) over a period of time spanning April 2015 – October 2016. If you would like more information of this component of the study just let me know at any point.

In the initial instance am looking for people willing to talk to me in a one-to-one interview about their experience of attending [name of university] in relation to what I have termed 'within university and beyond the campus'. What I mean by this is that I am not just interested in your experience of university in relation to your academic studies, or how you have settled in (although these are important topics that we will cover) but also about your experience of being the first in your immediate family to progress to study at university (if this is the case).

I am interested in hearing about your experiences and exploring aspects of your experience that you consider being important, there are no right or wrong answers.

What happens if I agree to participate? | Initial one-to-one Interviews

If you agree to partake in the research, then you will be sent a short questionnaire to fill out and return back (although you do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to provide the answer to). You will then be invited to attend a one-to-one interview. Here I will ask some questions and you will be free to respond in any way you so wish, importantly, you don't have to answer everything I ask. The interview will take place at a time and location convenient to you. Here we will explore your educational background, your journey to and experience of university and your experience of being the first in your family to attend university.

I anticipate that the length of interviews will vary depending on what you have to share. As a rough estimation, I anticipate that initial interviews should last approximately 1-2 hours, although it varies depending on how much you have to share. The interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will then be transcribed and analysed as part of my doctoral research.

Why take part?

Participating in research is often an enjoyable and interesting experience. You will also gain experience in participating in academic/social research. Beyond this, it is important to me that people's voices are heard especially those students who have historically been excluded from higher education and who remain underrepresented in the UK's most elite universities. This research hopes to contribute to future academic, policy and public discussions regarding higher education, widening participation and educational policy at a time of severe educational austerity and when young people's educational and labour market opportunities are severely constrained.

Who has funded and approved this research:

The project is bona fide doctoral research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and supervised by Dr. Cath Lambert (Associate Professor, Sociology) and Dr. Richard Lampard (Senior Lecturer, Sociology). The project has been ethically approved by the University of Warwick and adheres to the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (March 2002).

Confidentiality and the right to refuse participation:

Should you wish not to discuss an issue or respond to a question that I have asked you are free to do so, in addition, you are free to withdraw from the project at any point. In both instances no reason is needed and doing so is without any negative consequences. In order to ensure confidentiality your name will be changed and any information that would lead to the identification of people or institutions will be removed/changed. Only I (Carli) will have access to interview recordings, transcripts and other data collected as part of this project.

What happens with the results?

The results of the project will be analysed and written up for my thesis submitted for the fulfillment of my PhD in Sociology. Sometimes I will anonymously quote from the interviews although no one will be able to tell who you are. Pseudonyms will be used; real names will not be used within this research study or its dissemination. The findings from this research will be used in conference presentations and in academic journal articles. I will also be sharing the broad research findings with the Widening Participation Department at your university who are keen to learn from the project. They will not be able to identify who you are from the findings that I share. Only I will be able to access and listen to interview recordings, these will not be disseminated or shared.

Informed Consent and the Right to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at any point prior to the writing up of the final thesis. You will be informed when this is through email. Moreover, you are also free to stop the interview at any point.

Refer a friend!

If you know someone who might be the kind of person I am looking to talk to and who maybe interested in this study then please direct them to the project website (<http://www.firstgenuk.wordpress.com>) or forward them this form / my email.

Concerns:

If you have any concerns about this study, please contact my supervisors Dr. Catherine Lambert (Cath.Lambert@warwick.ac.uk) and Dr. Richard Lampard (Richard.Lampard@warwick.ac.uk).

Questions:

Please email me if you would like to ask for information or to discuss the project in further detail.

Notes: *First-generation means that you are the first in your immediate family to study at university, you might have siblings that are at university but your parents/guardians did not study at university.

Best,



Carli-Ria Rowell
ESRC Doctoral Researcher in Sociology

Thank you for sparing the time to read this information sheet.

4 - Participant Informed Consent Form – Initial One-to-one Interviews

Title of Project

Working-class, first-generation students' experiences of being at an elite university.

Researcher

Carli Ria Rowell, Doctoral Researcher, Sociology Department, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL. E-mail: c.r.rowell@warwick.ac.uk

Description of Research Project

I am a doctoral researcher from the department of Sociology at the University of Warwick interested in the experiences of first-generation* working-class students. I am a first-generation working-class student who is 24 years of age. As part of my doctoral research I am conducting ethnographic research (where researchers observe and/or interact with a study's participants in their real-life environment) into the university experiences of first-generation, working-class students' at [name of university].

As part of my doctoral research I am conducting observations of university open days and various social events at [name of university]. In addition, I hope to conduct research with working-class, first-generation students through a variety of research methods (photo elicitation, walking tours, driving tours) over a period of time spanning April 2015 – October 2016.

At the end of the interviews participants will be asked if they would like more information about partaking in other aspects of the research. In order to ensure confidentiality your name will be changed and any information that would lead to the identification of people or institutions will be removed/changed. Only I (Carli) will have access to interview recordings, transcripts and other data collected as part of this project. The results of this study may be published.

Description of Interview

This is to state that you have agreed to participate in an initial interview that should last approximately 1 -2 hours, although may last longer depending on what you have to say. Within this interview I will ask broad questions regarding your experience of attending [name of university] in relation to what I have termed 'within university and beyond the campus'.

This consent form is intended to check that you are happy with the information you have received about this study, that you are aware of your rights as a participant and to confirm that you wish to take part in the study.

Please circle as appropriate

1. Have you been given a description of the general purpose of the research?
2. **Yes**
3. Have you been given the opportunity to discuss any questions with the researcher?
Yes

4. Have you received enough information to decide whether or not you wish to take part in the study? **Yes**
5. Do you understand that you are free to refuse to answer any questions? **Yes**
6. Do you understand that you have the right to terminate the interview/research at any time? **Yes**
7. Do you understand that the information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence, and personal details will be anonymised? **Yes**
8. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any point up until the writing up of the research results (which will be informed to you through email) without explanation and that withdrawal from the study will bring no negative consequences? **Yes**
9. Do you agree to take part in the study? **Yes**

Signature _____ Date _____

Print Name _____

Permission to use Interview Quotations

I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in a final research report and other publications. I understand these will be used anonymously, with names, places and identifying details changed.

Signature _____ Date _____

Print Name _____

If you have any concerns about the project or your participation, please feel free to contact my supervisors.

Cath Lambert | University of Warwick | Cath.Lambert@warwick.ac.uk

Richard Lampard | University of Warwick | Richard.Lampard@warwick.ac.uk

Best,



Carli-Ria Rowell
ESRC Doctoral Researcher in Sociology

5a - Photos Elicitation Information Sheet

Title of Project

Working-class, first-generation students' experiences of being at an elite university.

Researcher

Carli Ria Rowell, Doctoral Researcher, Sociology Department, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL. E-mail: c.r.rowell@warwick.ac.uk

Expression of Interest

You have been given this sheet as you recently expressed an interest in partaking in the walking and / or driving interview. This sheet provides information regarding the walking and / or driving should you wish to partake in said aspect of the research.

As part of the study exploring the experiences of working-class, first-generation students' experiences of studying at an elite university I am inviting participants to partake in a walking and / or driving tours. This is in order for me to understand participants' experiences of being a working-class, first-generation student at an elite university as it is experienced and relates to participants 'home'.

Aim of photo elicitation interview

I would like to get to know how you experience and what it means to you to be a first-generation university student at [name of university] through a series of photos that you take and share with me. If you decide to partake, you will be asked to take a series of photographs that documents your experience of being a working-class, first-generation student at an elite university. The content and focus is up to you, but to give you an idea you might take photographs that document:

1. Your experience of being the first in your family to study at university.
2. Your experience of moving between university and home.
3. Who you are at university and who you are at home.
4. Your university experience.
5. Anything else you would like to share that shows me who you are and what your university experience means to you.

You are not bound by these suggestions; you can take photos of anything you'd like in relation to the study - anything that you wish to share will be of help when telling the whole story in relation to the research.

The Photo Elicitation Interview

After you share the photos with me I'd like to arrange to talk with you about what the images mean to you, this is a 'photo elicitation interview'. We will arrange a date and location that suits you.

Informed Consent and The Right to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the photo elicitation component of the study (and the study per se) at any point until the writing up of the research begins. Similarly, you are free to withdraw a photo, or a selection of photos, or indeed all of the photos from the study should you wish to at any point until the writing up of the research begins. You will be informed when this is through email. You will be also be asked specifically for permission pertaining to the right to reproduce the individual photos that you have taken within the thesis and throughout the publication of results.

Questions

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like further information or clarification. I would be more than happy to come and talk about it with you in person if that would be helpful, or clarify through email (c.r.rowell@warwick.ac.uk).

Concerns

If you have any concerns about the project or your participation, please feel free to contact my supervisors.

Cath Lambert | University of Warwick | Cath.Lambert@warwick.ac.uk

Richard Lampard | University of Warwick | Richard.Lampard@warwick.ac.uk

Best,

Carli Rowell

ESRC Doctoral Researcher in Sociology

5b - Photo Elicitation Guidelines

As part of the study exploring the experiences of working-class, first-generation students' experiences of studying at an elite university I am inviting participants to partake in a photo elicitation interview. You have been given the photo elicitation guidelines as you have expressed an interest in partaking in this aspect of the project.

Aim of photo elicitation interview

I would like to get to know how you experience and what it means to you to be a first generation university student at a Russell Group University through a series of photos that you take and share with me. The content and focus is up to you, but to give you an idea you might take photographs that document:

- Your experience of being the first in your family to study at university.
- Your experience of moving between university and home.
- Who you are at university and who you are at home.
- Your university experience.

5. And anything else you would like to share that shows me who you are and what your university experience means to you.

You are not bound by these suggestions; you can write about anything you'd like in relation to the study. Anything you have will be helpful when telling the whole story in relation to the research.

The photos

- Can be taken at any time, at any place, of any one, and of anything.
- May depict places, objects or people but do not have to.
- Can be metaphorical, figurative or abstract.

You may also

- Bring photos that were taken not for this study (i.e. pre-existing)
- Share with me your experience in various other ways, for example, through videos, poems, artwork (among any other way you can think of).
- Or anything else you wish to share with me.

When to take the photos

Please take photographs using a smart phone or digital camera (or I can provide you with a disposable camera) from now until you have taken all images that you wish too.

When taking photos that include people, it would be best if you could obtain the permission of the people in the photo. If you are unable to, it would be best if,

when taking photos where people are present, that their faces are not easily identifiable.

When to return the photos to me

Once you have finished taking photos please send the photos to me (via email or in person). I will then print them off. We will arrange a date to meet to chat about the photos nearer the time.

When we will meet to discuss the photos

After you share the photos with me, I'd like to arrange to talk with you about what the images mean to you. We will arrange a date and location that suits you.

Informed Consent and The Right to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the photo elicitation component of the study (and the study per se) at any point until the analysis of the data begins. Similarly, you are free to withdraw a photo, or a selection of photos from the study should you wish to at any point until the analysis of the data begins. You will be informed when this is through email. You will be also be asked specifically for permission pertaining to the right to reproduce the photos that you have taken within the thesis and throughout the publication of results.

Questions

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you are having difficulty understanding the instructions or if you have any questions. I would be more than happy to come and talk about it with you in person if that would be helpful, or clarify through email (c.r.rowell@warwick.ac.uk).

Concerns

If you have any concerns about the project or your participation, please feel free to contact my supervisors.

Cath Lambert | University of Warwick | Cath.Lambert@warwick.ac.uk

Richard Lampard | University of Warwick | Richard.Lampard@warwick.ac.uk

Best,



Carli Rowell

ESRC Doctoral Researcher in Sociology

5c - Participant Informed Consent Form – Photo Elicitation Interviews

Title of Project

Working-class, first-generation students' experiences of being at an elite university.

Researcher

Carli Ria Rowell, Doctoral Researcher, Sociology Department, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL. E-mail: c.r.rowell@warwick.ac.uk.

Description of Interview

This is to state that you have agreed to participate in photo elicitation interview that should last approximately 1- 2 hours, although may last longer depending on what you have to say. Within this interview I will ask broad questions regarding the photos that you have taken.

This consent form is intended to check that you are happy with the information you have received about the photo elicitation component of the study. That you are aware of your rights as a participant and to confirm that you wish to take part in the photo elicitation component of the study.

Please circle as appropriate

1. Have you been given a description of the general purpose of the research?
Yes
2. Have you been given the opportunity to discuss any questions with the researcher? **Yes**
3. Have you received enough information to decide whether or not you wish to take part in the photo elicitation component of the study? **Yes**
4. Do you understand that you are free to refuse to answer any questions asked in the photo elicitation interview study? **Yes**
5. Do you understand that you have the right to terminate the interview/research at any time? **Yes**
6. Do you understand that the information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence, and personal details will be anonymised? **Yes**
7. Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any point up until the writing up of the research results (which will be informed to you through email) without explanation and that withdrawal from the study will bring no negative consequences? **Yes**
8. Do you agree to take part in the study? **Yes**

Signature _____ Date _____

Print Name _____

Permission to use Interview Quotations

I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in a final research report and other publications. I understand these will be used anonymously, with names, places and identifying details changed including the faces individuals within the photographs blurred so as to highlight the identity of individuals within the photos.

Signature _____ Date _____

Print Name _____

Permission to use Photos Taken

I give permission for the below numbered and described photos to be in a) the final research report (PhD thesis) b) academic and other publications c) in conferences as specified below. I understand these photos will be used anonymously, with names, places and identifying details changed and where relevant the anonymising of individuals within the photos.

Photo Number	Brief Description of Photo	Permission to use in: final research report	Permission to use in: academic and other publications	Permission to use in: conferences
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

If you have any concerns about the project or your participation, please feel free to contact my supervisors.

Cath Lambert | University of Warwick | Cath.Lambert@warwick.ac.uk
 Richard Lampard | University of Warwick | Richard.Lampard@warwick.ac.uk

Best,



Carli-Ria Rowell
 ESRC Doctoral Researcher in Sociology

6 - Participant Information Sheet – Interviews with Participants Family and Friends

To the family of [name of participant],

Invitation to participate in Economic and Social Research Council funded doctoral research exploring working-class, first-generation students' experiences of attending an elite university.

I am writing with regards to a research project that I am currently leading and inviting you to participate. I am a doctoral researcher in the department of Sociology at the university of Warwick and the research is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and will hope to contribute to academic, policy and public debate regarding access to and experiences of higher education. The project is exploring the experiences of students who attend elite universities and who have little or no history of family university participation (specifically, working-class students whose parents did not study at university). I am also a student whose parents did not go to university and as part of the research have been meeting with students who are willing to talk to me about their experience of attending university and about their experience of being one of the first in their immediate family to study at university. I recently met with [name of participant] and thoroughly enjoyed chatting to her / him / they.

Interviews with family and friends

As part of the research I am also hoping to meet with some of the family and friends of some of that students that I met in order to talk about the perceptions of [name of participant] family and friends regarding [name of participant] decision to study at [name of university]. [name of participant] has expressed that you might be interested in partaking. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate, although please do not feel obliged to partake.

What happens if I agree to participate?

The project is ongoing and participating would involve meeting up at a time and place that suits you (i.e.- sometime over summer if your free, possibly and potentially in your home or a coffee shop in your home town) in order to conduct a face-to-face interview, alone or with other members of your family. And when I say 'interview', it is more like an informal friendly chat where the focus is your

views regarding [name of participant] decision to study at, and subsequent experience of [name of university]. The interview will be based on a few questions that I will ask you, but you should feel free to talk about whatever comes to mind in response to the questions I ask.

Why take part?

Participating in research is often an enjoyable and interesting experience. You will also gain experience in participating in academic/social research. Beyond this, it is important to me that people's voices are heard especially those students who have historically been excluded from higher education and who remain underrepresented in the UK's most elite universities. This research hopes to contribute to future academic, policy and public discussions regarding higher education, widening participation and educational policy at a time of severe austerity and when young people's educational and labour market opportunities are severely constrained.

Who has funded and approved this research:

The project is bona fide doctoral research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and supervised by Dr. Catherine Lambert (Associate Professor, Sociology) and Dr. Richard Lampard (Senior Lecturer, Sociology). The project has been ethically approved by the University of Warwick and adheres to the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (March 2002).

Confidentiality and the right to refuse participation:

Should you wish not to discuss an issue or respond to a question that I have asked you are free to do so, in addition, you are free to withdraw from the project at any point. In both instances no reason is needed and doing so is without any negative consequences. In order to ensure confidentiality your name will be changed and any information that would lead to the identification of people or institutions will be removed/changed. Only I (Carli) will have access to interview recordings, transcripts and other data collected as part of this project.

What happens with the results?

The results of the project will be analysed and written up for my thesis submitted for the fulfillment of my PhD in Sociology. Sometimes I will anonymously quote from the interviews although no one will be able to tell who you are. The findings from this research will be used in conference presentations and in academic journal articles. I will also be sharing the broad research findings with the Widening Participation Department at your son/daughters university who are keen to learn from the project.

Concerns

If you have any concerns about this study, please contact my supervisors Dr. Catherine Lambert (Cath.Lambert@warwick.ac.uk) and Dr. Richard Lampard (Richard.Lampard@warwick.ac.uk).

Questions:

If you would like to meet face-to-face to discuss the project or ask me some questions before deciding whether you want to partake then I would be delighted to do so, just drop me an email.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Rowell'.

Carli-Ria Rowell | ESRC Doctoral Researcher in Sociology

Thank you for sparing the time to read this information sheet.

7 - Pre-Interview Questionnaire (Distributed Online)

Many thanks for participating in 'Working-class, first-generation students' experiences of being at an elite university' an ESRC funded study.

These questions are about you, your background, your education and your families' education. If there are any questions you'd rather not answer, simply leave them blank. Similarly, if you do not know the answer to any of the questions leave them blank also.

1. Name
2. Contact email
3. Age
4. Country of Birth
5. How would you describe your gender?
6. How would you describe your ethnicity?
7. How would you describe your religious beliefs, if any?
8. What is the postcode where you were living when studying for you're A-Levels or equivalent and applying to university?
9. Have you been in foster or local authority care?
10. Have you been a young carer?
11. What is the occupation of your parents / guardians? (i.e. a- mother, b-father)?
12. What is the parent's / guardians highest qualification (i.e. a- mother, b-father)?
13. Do you have any siblings?
14. Do your siblings study at university?
15. Yes – A) Which university, which course and from what time period? (i.e. sister, chemistry at University of Warwick 2010-2013).
16. No- A) What is their highest level of qualification and what is their current occupation?
17. Name of institution where you completed A levels or equivalent?
18. Were you in receipt of free school meals at any point during your education?
19. If you were in receipt of free school meals at any point during your education can you remember for how many years and what school year (i.e. from year 10-12 or from year 1 to 11)?
20. Are you in receipt of a student loan?
21. Are you in receipt of a maintenance loan?

22. Are you in receipt of a maintenance grant? (If yes please specify how much).
23. Are you in receipt of a special support grant? (If yes please specify how much).
24. Are you in receipt of a Stellar University bursary, scholarship or other financial award from the university? If yes please specify b) which award; a) how much you receive per annum; and c) if the award is a one-year scholarship only OR yearly renewable (i.e. you get it every year at university).
25. What is your annual household income? You would have had this information when applying for student finance. *(Your household income is made up of your income plus that of the people who live with you, for example: your parents, your parent and their partner or your partner. Your parents' income is assessed if you're under 25 and depend on them financially. Your partner's income is assessed if you're over 25 and living with them.)*
26. Any other relevant information about your education that you wish to make known?
27. As part of the project I am meeting with individuals to conduct a one-to-one interview about their experience of being a working-class, first-generation student at [name of university]. I am going to be meeting up with individuals at time and place that suits them (i.e. on campus over coffee and cake). Would you like more information on partaking in an interview?
28. Later on in the project I would like to get to know more about what it means to be a working-class, first-generation students experience being a student at the [name of university] through a series of photos that you take and share with me and possibly through walking and / or driving interviews. The former is called a photo elicitation interview. Would you like more information on partaking in this stage of the research?

Thank you so much for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. If you expressed an interest in findings out more about the project Carli will be in contact with you in due course via the email you specified with more information.

8 - Initial One-to-one Interview Topic Guide

Project Title: Working-class, first-generation students' experiences of being at an elite university.

Educational Background

Can you tell me a little bit about your educational background/journey through education?

- Primary school, secondary
- Type of school, good at school, enjoy school, qualification, parent's attitudes towards schooling then and now?

Can you tell me about your GCSE's and what you did after GCSE's?

Can you tell me about your decision to study at university? How did you make that decision?

- Why?
- Did anyone motivate you to go to university?
- Are you the only one in your family to study at university? (Cousins, siblings)
- Have many of your family or friends gone to university?

Can you tell me about your decision to study at Stellar University?

- Why Stellar University? Participants / families reaction to wishing to study at university?
- Was it a conscious choice to move away / stay at home? Why?
- What was your reaction when you were accepted? Did you celebrate? Were your family and friends pleased for you?
- What did you know about Stellar University beforehand?

Experiences of Stellar University

Thinking back to when you first arrived at Stellar University; what was your initial impression of Stellar? How did you feel?

- What do you remember about your first few days?
- What do you think about fresher's week? Did you enjoy it?

Can you tell me about Stellar University? What is the Stellar University like socially and culturally? As a learning space?

- How have you found Stellar University academically, socially?
- Did you make friends easily? What are these friends like?
- Are your friends different to the friends you have at home? In what way?
- How have you found settling into university?

- Have you ever had any difficulties of ‘fitting in’ at university? Can you tell me about that? How have you tried to fit in? How did that make you feel?

Friends and family

What do your family and friends think about your decision to study at university?

Do your family and friends know much about what you get up to at university?

Do you speak to your friends from home about university? (Course, social life)

Do you speak/see your home friends and family as much as you used to now you’re at university? If not, why?

Changes

Do you feel that you have changed since being at Stellar University?

- Over the course of your degree; In what ways; Why do you think this is?
- Positive/ negative changes?

Would you say your family and friends from home would say that you have changed since being at university? What would they say that has changed about you?

Have these changes brought you closer, or made you more distance from your family and friends from home?

Has your university experience affected relationships with your family and friends (romantic, friendship or family).

- In what ways; Why do you think this is; How does that make you feel?
- Do you think you have made any sacrifices since going to university? What?
- Do you think you have made any gains from university?

Home and Elite University

Can you tell me a little bit about the neighborhood where you grew up? / where you live?

Did many people from your neighborhood go on to study at university?

What is it like when you go back home from university?

Social Class

What can you tell me about social class?

What do you think makes someone’s social class?

What social class are you? Why so?

What social class would you say your immediate family are? Why so?

What does it mean to be [insert identified class] class?

Are there situations when your social class becomes significant at university?

Has class ever been a factor in how you interact on campus?

Has there ever been an incident here on campus where you felt your class position caused you to be left out, put down, dismissed, or discriminated against?

What about your ethnic background?

Elite University attendance and Social Mobility

Do you think your social class position **is changing** as a result of attending university?

- YES: Why? How is this? How does this make you feel?
- NO: Do you think that your class position will change as a result of attending university? Why? How is this? How does this make you feel?

What can you tell me about social mobility?

Do you see yourself as engaged in a process of social mobility into the middle classes?
Why? How does this make you feel?

Do you think that you aspire to be middle-class? Why?

Do you feel that a university education is a vehicle for social mobility, do you feel your attendance at Stellar University will enable you to move from one class to the next?

Is there anything else that the participant would like to share?

Ask participants if they would like any information on photo elicitation and / or walking and driving tours.